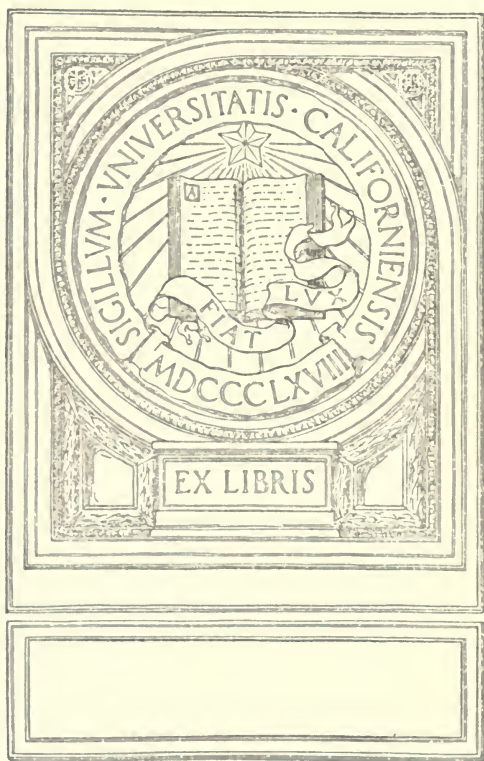




Just about a boy

By

W·S·Phillips
(*El Comancho*)



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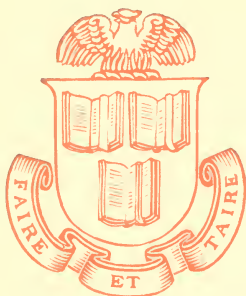
GEORGE J. F. KIMBLE

Just About a Boy

BY

WALTER S. PHILLIPS

(El Comancho)



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DEDICATION

THERE ARE BOYS STILL IN THIS OLD WORLD OF OURS—HAPPY, BRIGHT LITTLE SAVAGES WHO HAVE STILL TO BECOME CIVILIZED AND LEARN A LANGUAGE. UNTIL THEN THEY WILL LOVE THE WOODS AND THE WILDS AND BECOME FRIENDS WITH ALL THE VAST POPULATION OF THE WILDERNESS AND SO LEARN ITS SECRETS. SUCH A BOY IS A SAFE BOY IF HE FOLLOW THIS NATURAL BENT, FOR THERE IS NOTHING VICIOUS ABOUT THE WILDERNESS, AND TO THE BOY WHO LOVES IT THE WORLD OVER THIS LITTLE BOOK IS DEDICATED.

THE AUTHOR.

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PREFACE

These little stories are not written with the idea of adding any shining light to the large literature of the English language, but are just simple days taken from the life of a simple Western boy, who grew up along the shores of a little Western river.

This boy was no better and probably no worse than thousands of other boys, yet there is, and always was, a certain love of the wilderness and an insight into the lives of the wild people of the woods and valleys, that made him a gentle young savage, manly, true and keen.

I liked him from the first and associated more or less with him until he grew up and became the father of another boy, who is much like this boy that I know.

Such a boy interests other boys, and grown-up boys, too, and for this reason I was moved to tell of the doings of the young savage there on the little Western river first in the "Forest and Stream."

Soon I found that others loved this boy

PREFACE

for his gentle boyishness, and so I put his doings into book form.

This lad is actual flesh and blood, and has to-day outgrown his youthful ideas—yet he is just as good company as ever, and loves the wilderness as well.

He lives at ——; perhaps I had better not tell you just where he lives, but if you happen into the prairie country sixty miles or so west of the Missouri River, you may recognize the island where I first met him, for a railroad now crosses the river there, and its bridge rests on a central pier just at the foot of it—and above, in plain sight from the train, is the great sweep of bending river with the big walnut trees, still growing in the sandy soil—still throwing a grateful shade for troops of other boys who “go swimmin’ ” just above there as of yore. I saw all this only a short time ago, and I could not help thinking of the days when this boy of mine was a savage, whose soft footfall pattered about here and who was part of the life of those days.

THE AUTHOR.

Just About a Boy



I MEET THE BOY

ONCE in the time that is now represented by pictures in the mental gallery only, I fished a Western stream.

It was a pleasant stream, I remember, that dimpled in little waves where the gentle south wind kissed the wider reaches, and there were curious, wavy shadows under the opposite bank where the grasses hung down and the cottonwoods spread their ample branches to shade the water. Hidden reefs made riffles in the current. Circling eddies behind the boulders that occasionally poked up above the water, furnished resting places for big blue channel catfish that took my minnow or frog with a savage rush like a salmon.

The water was cool and clear, and the fish that lived there were full of fight, and such good eating that I often wandered to this Western river and cast my bait.

True, it was "not all of fishing to fish" in those days, just as it is now, and I mixed my time between fishing and watching the natural beauties of the landscape.

On this particular day in June I had waded down the stream until the drowse of noontide was in the air. I was tired of fishing and of fish, had fought great blue-black fellows until, for once at least, I wanted no more; so I climbed out on the shaded point of the little island in mid-stream and stretched at full length along the grass, resting and content in watching the life I saw around me.

Swallows came tacking along near the surface of the river, darting up, down and crosswise, as they feasted on the insect inhabitants of the air. Fleecy clouds floated overhead and disappeared in space like phantom balloons. A saucy kingfisher flashed up from somewhere and

came to a stop on a nearby snag, looking for all the world like a part of the dead wood a moment after he alighted, and I forgot all about him until I heard a splash and knew instinctively that another small fish lacked wisdom, but had found it out too late.

Bees, the only busy things in sight, fumbled the yellow heads of a few rosin weeds that looked toward the sun. The river people sang with crooning voices an underwater song in the hurrying ripples, tinkle, bubble, gurgle—the quiet swirl of the waters.

A splash up at the head of the rapids where “the big one got away” an hour before, another splash in the pool below, and a circle of ever-widening rings.

A big heron stalked lazily along a sandbar three hundred or four hundred yards down stream, and the summer air made him as big as an ostrich.

A soft patter of bare feet announced the arrival of the boy. He had waded across to the head of the island and then came by

land to the lower end. He saw me and stopped short, hesitatingly.

He was all boy, too, about fourteen or fifteen years old, sturdy, bright-faced, exceedingly homely and clad in a straw hat the worse for wear, a flannel shirt wide open at the throat, a leather belt with a knife sheath dangling from it, and—well, the rest of his costume was mostly an expression of gladness. He was certainly a picture of health and youthful “orneriness” as he stood there in the June sunshine, digging one bare toe into the sand and balancing himself with a long cane fishpole in an uneasy way, and I made a mental note that I somehow liked that boy.

“Hello, young man! Fishing, are you?”

“Yep.”

“Catch anything yet?”

“Yep.”

“Where are your fish?”

“Got ’em picketed out up at th’ head o’ th’ ilan’. Git any?”

“Yes, I have quite a string down

there," I said, pointing toward the water where I had secured my fish.

The boy walked down, dropped his fish-pole and examined my string with a critical eye. "Got some good ones, ain't yeh?"

"Yes, pretty fair, I think, for half a day's casting."

"I got 'bout that many, and I've on'y bin out 'bout two hours. Run out o' bait 'n' come down here for minnies."

I saw no net or other contrivance for securing minnows, so I asked: "How do you catch your bait?"

"Seine 'em," laconically.

"Where's your net?"

"Over yonder," jerking his thumb in the direction of a dense clump of willows. "Got 'er cached sost I can git it when I want it. Say, gee! that's uh dandy pole yeh got, ain't it, 'n' uh reel too!" he remarked, casting an admiring glance at the old lancewood rod that leaned against the bushes.

"Yes, that old rod is a good one; not

very handsome, but it has stood the test, and I know what it will do."

"Gee, wish I had uh pole like that. Must be fun to see ole Balaam go with all that line; 'nen uh little Rastus 'd make 'er bend, too, I reckon," he added, reflectively.

I did not then understand that this boy had a boyish name of his own for the people of the wilderness, but I afterward learned that "Balaam" meant a large fish and "Rastus" was a small one, so I replied that all kinds and sizes of fish "made her bend."

The boy closely examined and tested the balance of the rod, remarked that "she switched like uh buggy whip," and showed so much interest that I concluded to let him "try her."

"Would you like to catch a fish with my rod?"

"Would I? Well, I guess yes."

"All right, now I'll show you a few tricks about handling it, so you won't smash my tip, you know; and then you may try your skill."

He was delighted, and paid strict attention as I explained the wrist movement in the cast. In a few trials he had mastered the knack; indeed, he took to it as naturally as a duck to water, and was ready.

“Reeckon I’ll git uh few dandy red-horse minnies, ’nen I’ll git uh Balaam sure right crost there by that ole root. Theys allus uh Balaam er two over there, ’n’ I’ll git one all right.”

He scrambled into a thick clump of willows on the island, ducked in among the branches and brought out a minnow net made of a yard or so of blue mosquito bar, with the ends rolled around a couple of willow sticks. With this primitive outfit he waded out into the current, and making a quick sweep through an eddy behind a rock, dipped up about a dozen fine red-horse minnows, bright as a bit of rainbow, and brought them ashore. Here he picked out three or four, remarking: “Yeh want to git these rough-nosed fellers if yeh want good bait,” though I saw no difference in

the color or size or any characteristic of the minnows until the boy showed me the heads of two or three of them. One was smooth and slippery as any fish is, while the other fish felt as if it had a skin of sandpaper, it was so rough. The boy declared that a catfish took the rough kind "quicker 'n' lightnin'," when it would not notice the smooth kind that looked just like it.

He put the few baits that he had selected into his hat, and then complacently put the hat back on his head, saying: "They're handy that way, an' yeh can git 'em fresh whenever yeh run out o' bait."

He strung one on the hook to his liking and then waded out into the stream within casting distance of the old root he had mentioned. At the third cast he got a strike, and in a moment I saw he had a large one. "Got ole Balaam, sure!" he shouted. I gave him directions about handling for a few moments, but soon saw that he instinctively understood the hand-

ling of a rod and reel, so I stood still and watched the fight, and a pretty one it was, too.

In about ten minutes the boy started back for shore, working the fish slowly and carefully across the stream, leading him always into the stiffest currents he could. I waded out with the net and stood ready, and when the catch came within reach I landed him safe in the net. "Gee! that's uh slick way to git yer fish, too," said the boy, as he noted the landing-net act. We walked up on the island and unhooked the prize, which tipped the pocket scales at nine and a quarter pounds, and then sat in the shade talking. The boy was enthusiastic about the working of the rod, though a nine-pound fish seemed to interest him only as an adjunct to the sport of reeling in and reeling out.

"Gee! that's uh mighty nice pole. How much d' yeh pay for 'em?" I told him the run of prices on rods, and explained the points of a good one to him. "I'm goin' to have one like that," he said, and

I knew he meant it by the snap of his square young jaw.

In our conversation that afternoon I found that the boy knew every foot of the river for miles up and down stream, and every foot of the surrounding country besides, for he had a shotgun and a rifle and hunted in season.

He said he went to school "sometimes," and always camped out in vacation. He had his boat and cayuse, too, so he was fixed for all kinds of outdoor sport. When the sun began to lengthen the shadows the boy reckoned he'd "vamoose," but we parted firm friends, and with the understanding that we would meet again on the following Saturday at the dam, and fish the riffles down stream together.

"So long," said the boy, as he gathered up his long cane pole and his big fish, and silently disappeared into the bushes of the island, barefooted and barelegged, unmindful of the scratching bushes or the saw-like edges of the wiry slough grass.

"There is a boy that is a character and

is a good one to study," I thought. I was right, too; for I saw him grow up, hunted, fished and traveled with him, was at his wedding and am good friends with his five-year-old, who shows signs of being a "chip from the old block" already.

A DAY ALONG THE RIVER

WHEN Saturday came I went to the dam, equipped for fishing. The boy was there ahead of me, and had already seined a lot of his favorite red-horse minnows, and was keeping them alive in a little pond he had built where the waters from a spring trickled down the hill.

“Hello, you’re on time ’n’ I’m all ready. Got lots o’ bait for both o’ us. Got uh new pole, too. What d’ye think o’ her?” he asked, without giving me time to get a word in edgeways.

I took the rod, a stout lancewood, and examined it. It was perfect in every particular except weight, and I told him it was a trifle heavy, I thought, otherwise all right. “Well, yeh see; I kinder thought I might bust uh little one ’fore I got ust to it, so I got this one. Could ’a’ got uh littler one, but I was uh little leery ’bout

it. Reckon she'll do. Hain't half so heavy as my ole cane, anyhow," he sagely remarked, as he fondled the new rod and tested the spring of its bending length.

"Here, put some o' these in yer hat," he continued, scooping up a double handful of fine minnows. I pushed my bait box around and he dumped them in, but put his own in his hat, because they were handier there according to his notion. The minnow net he stuck through his belt, letting it dangle without any brails. He could cut the latter anywhere along the stream, so he did not bother himself with the extra weight.

"Ready?" he asked. "Yes," I answered, and we started into the stream, shoes, trousers and all, for he had his on this time perforce, as there were houses on each side of the stream.

We waded out to a bar that reached partly across the river below the dam, and then the boy showed his knowledge. "Here, yeh wade 'bout four steps straight toward th' dam, and you'll find uh big flat

rock there, where th' water is waist deep. Git up on th' rock, and it'll only come half-way to yer knees. When yeh git there, throw yer bait right where those two little currents meet, 'n' you'll git uh Baalam, for they's uh place where they stay, down in amongst th' rocks there. I know, 'cause I've dove down there 'n' bin all over th' bottom. Yeh must throw right ed-zackly where I tell yeh, or you'll git fast, for they's uh big old cottonwood stump jammed in among th' rocks on this side about two feet, 'n' th' rock bottom goes down in uh straight step-off on th' other side, 'n' they's only 'bout three feet clear water between th' two. It's 'bout nine or ten feet deep, 'n' they's uh current at th' bottom that goes up stream toward th' dam, 'cause th' water falls 'n' makes sort o' an undertow. Go ahead."

I did as directed, and found the rock as described, and caught some fine fish of six or seven pounds weight before the boy shouted to "Come on, this is petered out." By questioning I found that the

boy had actually been all over the bottom of the river, right up to the very falls of the dam, unmindful of a strong undertow that had drowned several men.

He seemed to think nothing of the danger he exposed himself to by taking chances among those currents.

"It's easy to swim in there if yeh know how," he said. "All yeh got to do when yeh want to git out is juss come up to th' top quick, nen turn on yer back 'n' float out with th' top current, that's going down stream all time, 'cept right up by th' fall, and there th' top current goes up stream 'n' th' undertow goes down. Yeh can feel th' difference soon as yeh strike it; so, if yeh are close to th' fall, dive 'n' stay down till yeh meet th' undertow comin' back, nen shoot to th' top 'n' turn on yer back, 'n' yore all right. I mighty near got caught once, though, 'fore I found out 'bout th' currents," he added reflectively. "I got shoved down 'n' yanked back up five er six times, but I juss helt my breath 'n' reckoned I could

keep it up tull I got into th' right current. Had uh purty close call, though."

We were slowly wading along down stream as we talked, and each picked up a good fish here and there among the eddies until we got near the foot of the rapid, half a mile from the dam. "Now come here 'n' I'll show yeh 'nother place," said the boy. "Throw right over there, juss above that ole maple on th' bank. They's uh deep place just below there, 'n' th' current has cut away back nunder th' roots. Some day th' maple is goin' to tumble in 'n' spoil that hole. I come down through here one day 'n' didn't git a bite from th' dam clear here, nen I got a three-pounder out o' this hole, nen I got uh 'nother, 'n' uh 'nother, tull I stood here 'n' caught twenty-nine of 'em, all 'bout th' same size 'n' 'bout three pounds weight. I didn't know they was uh hole there then, but I found it out afterwards, 'n' I always ketch 'bout th' same size fish there, 'bout three pounds."

I had cast into the place indicated, and

almost before the minnow struck I had a fish which, when landed, was sure enough “ ’bout a three-pounder.” We caught several more there, and they ran just about the same size, and I found that the hole could be depended on for “three-pounders” almost every time.

“Now, less git out ’n’ walk down to th’ big walnut trees,” said the boy. “They ain’t any use fishin’ in this still water below here. Might git uh few, but it’s too slow. I like swift water, so th’ fish ’ill run when yeh git uh holt of ’em. ’Tain’t no fun to fish ’n still water.”

I thought the boy spoke more wisely than he knew, for he had the true sportsman’s instinct, and only needed a few hints properly administered to show him that he was really enjoying life just about in the right way.

We climbed the bank, wet and dripping, walked down stream along a path that the boy seemed to know would come to the river again at about the right place.

“Mighty good place for quails ’n’ rabbits

up there 'bout three mile," the boy remarked, as we crossed a little creek. "If yer here this winter I'll show yeh some fun. I know right where to find 'em, 'n' 'thout uh dog, too. Don't like uh dog to hunt with anyhow," continued the young savage. "Makes too much noise, nen they always run ahead 'n' scare ever'thing up before yeh git close enough. Best way is to trail 'em."

"How can you trail quail?" I asked.

"Easy. They leave lots o' signs, even if they hain't any snow on th' ground. They kind o' flutter in th' dust like uh chicken does in th' middle o' th' day, 'n' they always come to 'bout th' same place at th' same time every day, if they hain't hunted too much so's to scare 'em away, nen they go to some other place 'n' begin all over again."

This was news to me, but I found out that the boy was a regular Indian in his ways of hunting, and whatever he said about game or fish of that section I learned to depend on as accurate, for he

knew the habits of wild creatures as few people do. He loved them, and only killed what he could use, and later I have seen him pass a covey of quail after he had all he wanted and never pay any more attention to them than he would to a tame chicken, except to remark, "I'll see you later, my beauties," and he generally did it, too.

When we reached the lower riffles we waded in again and fished to the island before lunch time; then I suggested that we climb out and have a little lunch, a proposition that suited him exactly.

"We'll go to my camp here 'n' have as good uh feed as though we was home," he said, as we tied our fish in a shady spot and climbed upon the island. "Yeh see I fish here uh good deal, and I've fixed up uh kind o' uh camp, sost I'm at home like. 'Tain't much, but we can git uh bite to eat all right," he said, as he led the way toward the center of the island, where the bushes seemed so thick that one could scarcely get through them. To my sur-

prise, the boy twisted and turned about, always with a clear path under our feet and easy traveling, until we reached a little open space where three giant cottonwood trees grew close together. "Yeh see, I cut uh trail in here sost I could git in 'thout much trouble. Had to wind around to make it blind. If I'd cut it straight ever'boby would come right into camp, but it winds around sost yeh can't see any trail 'tall 'less yeh know where to go."

That, I thought, was certainly an Indian way of hiding camp and leaving the front door open, trusting to the blindness so common among civilized people for protection.

"Now, we'll have uh feed right," said the boy, as we reached his "camp," which appeared to be only a snug little opening in the middle of the thicket; but as he began to brush aside innocent looking little bunches of leaves and twigs, I saw the same Indian methods displayed again, for under each pile reposed some essential camp article, and no two in a place. A

coffee pot appeared, then a frying-pan, tin plate, spoons, knives, forks, and last, but not least, he scattered a few bits of bark and revealed a hollow space dug under the base of one of the cottonwoods, and in this hole a wooden box. Opening the box, he brought forth a bag of oiled canvas, and this in turn produced coffee, sugar, salt and a generous slab of bacon, each tied up in a separate oiled bag.

“Hain’t got ’ny bread juss now,” he remarked; “got to bring some down, too. Eat the last up uh few days ago.”

I had plenty of lunch in my basket, and with fresh fish fried with the bacon and hot black coffee we made a meal that was fit for kings.

“I got uh little tent over yonder, too, so I’m pretty much at home down here rain er shine. Got ’nother outfit cached up th’ river, too. Got uh stove up they ’n’ uh shovel, besides uh little tent ’n’ plenty o’ grub. Yeh see I don’t like to pack stuff with me, so I pack it out ’n’ hide it, ’n’ nen I’m fixed.” Truly, the boy was a

half-wild person in those days, and his soft step wandered through all the byways of his domain and he was king.

After our lunch he stowed things away, and deftly hid them by making the surroundings appear perfectly natural, and I would never have suspected the existence of a camp there when he got through.

"Now, less go home. I've got all th' fishin' I want if you have," he said, after we had rested and talked an hour after dinner. "Yeh go ahead 'n' I'll kind o' kick th' leaves over yer trail," he said, as we were ready to leave. I went down the windings of the trail and then discovered that he had cut the bushes about half off on one side and bent them down over the cut to hide it and show only an ordinary broken bush, perfectly natural in the woods, and thus had cut his trail into camp.

When we got back to town I invited him up to the house, to come in just whenever he felt like it or wanted company on a trip, and that is how we came

to be close friends and travel "pardners" in all these after years, for the boy came in often and was always ready for a trip somewhere.

HONEY HUNTING WITH THE BOY

“SAY, want to go 'n' git some wile honey?” said the boy one day in the fall, as he rode up to the barn door. “Know where they's uh dandy tree juss full o' honey. Found it up th' river yesterday when I was tinkerin' round there with th' boat. Lots o' squirrels up there, too, 'n' we can have uh reg'lar picnic if we start early. I'll go home 'n' hitch up, 'n' yeh git ready, will yeh?”

“Yes, I guess I can fix it,” I answered. “You get your things together and be back in an hour, and I will be ready.”

“Aw right,” he said, and was away like the wind on his black pony, a little beast that seemed to enjoy the boy's company as well as I did, by the way.

In an hour he drove up to the gate, and a drive of eight miles brought us to the creek a half-mile west of the river and

opposite the point we wished to reach on the main road.

Here we stopped, and began to get ready for our walk. I was busy putting together what we wanted, and did not notice the boy for a few minutes, during which time he had unhitched the pony and dragged the buggy up by the fence, out of the way of passing teams. Then the pony was stripped and a halter with a picket line attached put on him and the other end anchored to the fence, so he could feed without reaching the road.

Then I saw a queer proceeding. The boy took the buggy cushion, whip, harness and everything movable out of the buggy, and piled them in a heap. Next he took his big belt knife and went to a thick patch of sumac bushes that grew about waist high on the other side of the road. Carefully he cut away these bushes in spots, cutting the stems close to the ground and piling the bushes carefully at one side. When he had several little clearings made in the thicket, he brought the harness and

other things over and deposited them, a few in each place that he had cleared.

I stood silently watching him, and he turned and saw me.

“Got to hide this truck,” he remarked. “If I didn’t, somebody ’d steal it while we wuz gone; so I juss fix it-sost they never know it’s here.”

While he said this he was dropping the bushes back where they had stood before, each one upright as it had grown, and looking as though it had never been disturbed. Where they showed an inclination to lop over, he stuck one or two into the ground and let them support the others.

“Come on,” he said, when he had finished. “Less git some squirrels.” I glanced back at the little thicket now growing as it had been before, apparently, and I could not but admire the young mind that had figured out so easily that no one would ever think of looking under a growing thicket for plunder.

His protection and reliance were in nature, and he knew nature’s features so

well that he counterfeited naturalness, and knew the human animals who might pass that way would never know the difference, that his cut-off bushes would not wilt before we got back, and that he would find his property just as safe as though under lock and key.

We climbed the fence and wandered among a growth of oak and "pig nut" trees until a squirrel scurried up a big oak, and then something else happened.

I had always circled a tree when two were hunting squirrels in company, but the boy said: "Hol' on, I'll show yeh how I git 'em when I'm alone."

He picked up a piece of a broken limb and walked to within thirty or forty feet of the tree, then cocked his shotgun and held it in his left hand. With the other he hurled the stick as far as he could on the opposite side of the tree, and before it struck the ground he had his gun at his shoulder waiting for the squirrel.

When the limb struck the dead leaves it made a great deal of noise on the

ground, and the squirrel swung around the trunk on our side. Instantly there was a flash, and down he came, dead as a mackerel.

“Yeh see, th’ squirrel gits scart at th’ noise ’n’ pops ’round th’ tree, watchin’ back, ’n’ never stops to think about th’ man ’at he saw comin’ when he run up there,” said the boy as he gathered up his kill and put up its head through a loop of string on his belt. They hain’t got uh lick o’ sense, anyhow,” he continued. “Now yeh see that bunch o’ leaves over ’n’ that little oak with th’ grapevine in? Well, that’s a summer’s nest, ’n’ most likely we’ll find uh squirrel there. He ain’t got sense enough to run when he hears th’ gun. Less go ’n’ git him.”

We went to the tree indicated, and the boy said: “Now, yeh git ready ’n’ I’ll git him up.”

I stood back, and the boy walked to the vine, jerked it sharply two or three times, and, sure enough, out popped a squirrel, which fell to my gun.

We wandered through the woods until late in the afternoon, killing several squirrels and some quail, but I saw no sign of bees or a bee tree, so I finally asked him where his bees were.

“Oh, ’crost th’ river. We won’t bother ’em till dark, ’cause we don’t want to kill ’em, and they’d sting us plenty in daylight,” he answered. “I’ll show yeh how I work th’ trick when it gits dark, so less go back to the wagon ’n’ git th’ things ’n’ uh bite to eat. Won’t take long to git th’ honey when th’ time comes, ’n’ we got to take th’ axe ’n’ pails when we go, ’n’ we’ll leave our game at th’ wagon.”

The sun had already painted the western sky in crimson and gold, against which the gnarled cottonwoods and oaks appeared in silhouette, and the elms wove a delicate tracery of drooping limbs. The frosted leaves had nearly all fallen to the ground, leaving only the more hardy or sheltered ones still on the trees to wait the chill touch that would wither and send them

fluttering down in zigzag flight as the morning sun rose.

The waiting silence of a fall evening had settled over the land while we were eating our lunch, and as the light faded the boy glanced comprehensively up and around as he said: "Well, I reckon we better hustle if we want to git that honey. I'll juss hide the guns, 'cause we won't need 'em to-night. Hain't no painters nor bears nor things in these woods, so all we need is the axe 'n' pails 'n' lanterns 'n' ropes. I'll git things 'n shape while you fix th' basket, nen we'll go."

When he had "fixed things," we shouldered the axe and other plunder and struck out through the woods for the bee tree. Reaching the river, the boy sat down and began unlacing his shoes, remarking: "Got to cross th' river here."

I did not fancy a plunge in the icy current of the stream so late in the season, and made some few remarks about a boat and coming up during the next few days.

“Pshaw!” said the boy, “ ’tain’t more’n knee deep all th’ way over. They’s uh sandbar here ’at runs kind o’ anglin’ down stream an’ it won’t take yeh more’n to yer knees anywhere. I been across here lots o’ times an’ I know. Yer feet ’ll git uh little cold, but you’ll feel better after yeh get out ’n yeh did ’fore yeh went in. C’m on, less git over.”

I had seen his intimate knowledge of things natural and local so well displayed before that I too began to strip for the wade, trusting to his guidance, and in a few minutes we were in the stream.

The water was awfully cold for the first few steps, and then our feet became so benumbed that we finished without any inconvenience, and felt as warm as toast a few minutes after we had put our clothing on again.

It was quite dark, and the stars were twinkling like fireflies among the branches when the boy halted, dropped the axe and pails and remarked, “Here she is.”

A great elm tree rose into the darkness

and its spreading branches ran forty or fifty feet from the trunk.

“Now, I’ll tell yeh,” said the boy, “you stay here an’ I’ll climb up an’ cut off th’ limb—that big one there,” he said, pointing upward.

“We got to chop th’ end off first, nen put th’ rope on her ’n’ cut it again closer to th’ tree. Yeh see th’ bees are pretty well out in uh holler place ’n th’ limb ’n’ hain’t in th’ holler trunk ’tall. I found that out when I was up here before.”

While he was talking he had taken a coil of rope out of one of the pails and thrown it up over the limb. Throwing off his coat and shoes, he climbed the double strand like a monkey and swung himself up over the limb. Then I fastened the axe on the line and he hauled it up.

Standing on the fork with one foot and the main trunk of the limb with the other, he began chopping the end off.

“They’re wakin’ up,” he said, laughingly, as the angered bees began to buzz

in the hollow under his feet. "It won't hurt 'em 'n' they'll only git mad for nuthin', 'cause they don't sting at night; they juss crawl out an' fall off. Reckon I better keep 'em in, tho', tull I git th' limb off," he continued, stooping down and stuffing his handkerchief into the small hole where the bees entered the hollow.

Soon the limb fell with a tearing crash down among the bushes on the ground. Then the boy drew the rope up and fastened it to the stump of the limb, throwing the end over another above him and letting it hang down to the ground.

"Now you take holt o' th' rope and git uh half hitch around something, sost yeh can hold her when I cut her off. We don't want to let her fall 'n' mash th' honey all up, so keep her stiddy till I c'n help yeh lower her when I git her cut off."

I did as directed, and the blows soon sounded again, echoless in the gloom of the night woods, as the boy swung the axe with a will.

"She's a-goin'; hol' on now!" he said, as an ominous cracking was heard, and then a few more cuts left the limb dangling at the end of the rope.

The boy dropped his axe and scrambled down the tree trunk, and together we lowered the big section of wood to the ground.

"Bring th' lantern 'n' pails now," said the boy, as he got his axe, and then listened with his ear against the limb to locate the length of the hollow by the noise of the bees inside. "Guess this'll 'bout git 'em," he said, and he began cutting a chip out.

Soon he made an opening in the log, and disclosed great combs of beautiful wild honey, over which the swarm of angry bees were writhing in a dark mass. As soon as the hole was open they began to crawl out, and the boy, with the aid of a splinter, flipped them out of the hollow by the handful.

"Look out now 'n' don't git excited," he said. "They won't sting at night

'nless yeh hurt 'em, 'n' if one crawls on yeh juss flip him off, sost he won't have uh chance. Yeh see—Gee! I got it that time!” he said, as he pinched a place on one finger, squeezing it up from underneath until it was white and a tiny globe of amber stood out on the skin.

“ 'Tain't nothin', though, 'n' won't even swell up 'f yeh squeeze th' poison out juss as quick as yeh git stung, that way. Gee! it always make uh col' chill run up 'n' down my back, anyway, ever' time I git it.

“Hol' still, theys one crawlin' up towards yer neck. There, now yer all right. Yeh see, if yeh move right quick, er slap at 'em er hurt 'em er anything, they'll sock uh stinger into yeh even at night, but if you 'member 'n' juss go easy yer all right. Guess I got most of 'em out now, 'n' I'll cut uh bigger hole sost we can git that comb out whole.

“Gee! that's nice-lookin', ain't it? Lots of it too! This tree is all right.”

The axe rang again, and the hole in the

limb grew larger, while the myriads of bees buzzed angrily among the leaves on the ground, helpless in the darkness.

"Guess that's all right now," said the boy, as he took the lantern and peered into the opening. "Gimme th' pails."

I handed him the pails and he carefully lifted the great new combs out one by one and deposited them on end in the pails. He had four large ones full of the finest light-colored honey when he had finished, and then called for the fifth.

"They's uh lot o' old honey here, too," he said, "an' we'll take th' clearest of it. 'Tain't as good flavor as th' new, but it's good honey all th' same. Th' rest of it I'm goin' to leave till to-morrow night, nen I'll come up 'n' git it 'n' th' bees too, 'cause this is uh dandy swarm, 'n' they'll stay here till they find uh new hive, 'n' lug ever' bit o' this honey to it.

"I'll leave plenty, sost they can't take it all away to-morrow, nen to-morrow night I'll come up with th' boat 'n' some sacks

'n' a saw, 'n' I'll juss fasten 'em in again while they're asleep, nen I'll saw off the limb, both ends, 'n' take her home 'n' fix 'em up 'n one o' my hives.'"

Here was more wisdom of the wild woods that was new to me, though I saw the simple reasoning in it and told the boy that I was glad the swarm would be cared for and not left to die of cold and lack of food after we had taken the fruits of their summer's labor.

In another hour we had forded the river again, and were on our way back to the buggy with our plunder, the boy having made two trips across the river in the darkness to land everything safely. "'Cause I know th' bar better'n you do, nen I don't mind th' cold water, anyhow,'" he explained.

The horse gave a little whinny as we reached the buggy, and he was soon spinning toward home, where we had to get the folks out of bed at 11 o'clock to sleepily view those beautiful combs and comment on the fruits of our trip.

Two or three days later the boy burst in on me with the information that he had "got that swarm o' bees over at th' house, 'n' it's uh dandy too."

AFTER DUCKS ALONG THE RIVER

“DUCKS ’re flyin’,” said the boy, as he met me at the corner. “Less go up river ’n’ git some. I know where they’s uh dandy place, string o’ pon’s out ’n the edge o’ th’ timber ’n’ some more up ’n uh big pasture, with corn fields right clost by.

“Always git lots up there when they’re a-flyin’, ’n’ sometimes uh goose, too. Will yeh go?”

“I guess we’d better. Any show for snipe up there?” I asked.

“Gee, yes! Always jacksnipe ’round th’ pond in th’ pasture. Yeh see, one end of it is kind o’ springy ’n’ has lots o’ little watery places in it where th’ cattle have tromped ’round, ’n’ th’ jacks ’re always at that end. Ain’t very many of ’em, but they’s gen’ly some.

“I’ll tell yeh what less do. I got uh good tent ’n’ outfit. Less take it ’n th’

boat 'n' go to-night 'n' camp, sost to be up there early 'n th' morning. That's th' best time, yeh know."

"All right, I guess I can fix it," I answered. "You go ahead and get ready, and I'll be over to the house in half an hour. What will we need to take in the way of grub?"

"Oh, I got 'nough grub cached up at th' maples to last us, 'n' I'll throw what else we want into my packsack 'n' pick up th' rest up there as we go along."

We separated and got our traps together, meeting at his house half an hour later, ready for the trip. It did not take long to get to the river and load the boat, and by the middle of the afternoon we had reached the boy's camp at the maples, about four miles up stream. Here he "dug up" a complete camp outfit, excepting blankets, from his snugly hidden cache, and we proceeded, equipped for staying two or three days if we chose.

When we reached a point opposite the ponds we pulled in and soon had camp

made among some jack oaks that grew well above the river, and when darkness came we were comfortably housed.

Ducks had been passed on the way up, flying in many directions, but none came near enough for a shot, as we were in mid-stream and only traveling, not taking any measures to conceal either ourselves or our boat.

Darkness settled down with a muddy sky and a promise of dirty weather, a prospect that set the boy to whistling contentedly as he put the finishing touches on the camp.

“Goin’ to git uh nor’west wind in th’ mornin’, I reckon,” he said, with a yawn; “ ’n’ if we do, we’ll git ducks, too, ’cause they’ll come a-hummin’ from th’ north if it comes uh little cold.

“Less go to bed, sost we can git up early.”

We curled up in our blankets, and the last thing I remember was watching the flare of red spring out of the bed of coals where our fire had been, every time a little

whirl of wind eddied down through the oaks and bulged the tent flaps open.

“Hay! Goin’ t’ sleep all day?”

The boy was up and dressed and reaching for the strings that held the flaps of the tent together when I opened my eyes. It was still dark as pitch, and the boy had the lantern lit inside the tent.

A cold, raw wind was hurrying down the river, tossing the branches and making the trees moan in a desolate way, and the low-hanging clouds hurried by with it.

“Come on, less git uh hustle on us, or it’ll be daylight ’fore we git started,” said the boy, as he skurried around making preparations for our morning meal.

I got the guns and shells out, and prepared the camp for leaving, while he was busy with the frying pan and coffee pot.

“They’re a-flyin’,” he said, as a flock of ducks hurtled by on whistling wings, following the course of the river.

After breakfast we hurried to the pond in the timber edge, and were soon con-

cealed in the high slough grass on the lee side of the water, a position the boy selected.

“Yeh see, th’ ducks ’ll come in with th’ wind ’n’ shoot down this way, ’n’en circle back ’gainst th’ wind. They come like uh streak, ’n’en when they pass th’ pond they come back slow ’gainst th’ wind, sost to ’light; ’n’en, when they pass us, is th’ time to plunk it into ’em. They are goin’ too fast with th’ wind, but they’re easy comin’ back.”

We had only got comfortably settled when a whistle of wings passed over us, going with the speed of an express train, with the wind.

“Teal,” said the boy, though it was still too dark to see more than a bit of swiftly moving black cloud against the sky as they passed.

“They’ll be back ’n uh minute, ’n’en whale away at ’em as they pass. Shoot at th’ bunch if yeh can’t see uh single bird,” said the boy.

Sure enough, a few minutes after the

sharp whistle of wings swiftly beating the air sounded again almost over us.

"Give it to 'em," said the boy, as he turned both barrels loose at the moving mass. I did the same, though neither could tell whether we had killed a bird or scored a miss after the flash of the guns.

"Reckon we must 'a' got one er two, anyhow," the boy remarked. "They can't get away, 'n' we can find 'em when it gits light, if they did," he continued.

When the next flock came the morning was gray enough to pick out our birds, and three teal fell as the guns barked. These the boy quickly brought in, and again we crouched, waiting in the grass.

A bunch of five mallards came next, and we stopped every one, a proceeding that so elated the boy that he characterized it as "a whole lot lucky."

Ducks in job lots kept coming, some passing without giving us a shot, others circling back only to fall as the guns cracked, and the pile grew beside us until we had twenty-nine between us for the

morning's shooting when the flight ceased and we had gathered in all the cripples.

"Less take these to camp, 'n'en go over to th' other pond," said the boy. "Reckon we can git uh few more over there if we sneak up on 'em, 'n'en we'll sure get uh few jacks, too, round th' springy end."

We packed our game to the tent and then went over to the pasture pond, walking up to it through a little draw that put into the valley.

"Oh, gee!" said the boy, in a stage whisper, as he peeped over a little bank of earth that hid us from the water.

"They's about fifty geese out there, settin' all tucked up like uh lot o' mummies. Got any big shot?"

"No, nothing but fours," I answered.

"Well, here; pull yours out," he said, swiftly throwing out his duck loads and replacing them with BB shells.

"I got lots of 'em, 'n' you can change yer shot. Wish we both had th' same size guns."

He was digging out the wads from a couple of his 12-gauge shells with his hunting knife as he spoke, and I was working nervously with a couple of my No. 10s.

When we had reloaded my shells with the heavy shot, the boy said: "Now, all ready; we'll count three 'n' raise up 'n' shoot. You take th' left side o' th' flock and I'll take th' right. Git in two shots 'n'en load juss as quick as ever you can, 'cause they may circle back."

The suspense was ended when the boy said "three," and we turned four loads loose among the unsuspecting geese at a distance of thirty or forty yards. A crackling flap of beating wings, mixed with frightened honkings and a gabble of sounds, smote our ears as the flock took to the air, leaving six of their number unable to rise. The boy threw in another shell and pitched the load after the retreating birds, and another one spread his wings and sailed out of the bunch at a flat angle, striking the ground a quarter of a mile

away in the open pasture. It took three more shots to stop the cripples before we could gather up the dead.

"Gee! ain't this luck for yeh?" said the boy, fairly beside himself, as he ran after the cripples, working like a ten horse-power engine.

When we had our six piled up the boy said: "Now I'll go 'n' git that cripple out'n th' pasture, 'n' you better circle around th' other end of th' pond by th' springs, 'cause maybe you'll git a jack er two in there yet."

I did as directed, and got a pair of fine fat snipes out of five that pitched up from the marsh. Looking toward the boy, I saw him foot-racing the wounded goose, which could half run, half fly, and keep ahead of him.

After chasing it for a couple of hundred yards, he stopped, threw up his gun, and as the white puff of smoke pitched out of the gun, the goose doubled up. Coming back, we gathered up our game and struck for camp, the boy keeping up a running

fire of talk on geese in general and these geese in particular, as proud of potting the seven as though it had been the making of a million dollars—and probably more satisfied with it.

When we reached camp he was willing to go home, and we soon had the boat under way. At the maples we re-cached his camp outfit and continued down stream, reaching home before dark, and every one that saw us on the way home from the boat had to stop and ask a thousand questions about those blessed geese.

TELL-TALE TRACKS

THE sky was gray and dull, hanging like a sheet of lead over the world, and there was a "snowy feel" to the air that seemed the forerunner of a storm. Sounds were muffled and subdued, and there was a waiting air over everything.

The boy came swinging around the corner, his coat wide open and hands deep in the inner recesses of his cavernous pockets, as he strode along whistling merrily and glancing upward occasionally.

"Say," he said, as he saw me, "goin' to have uh trackin' snow to-night. Less go huntin' to-morrow, will yeh? I know where they's uh lot o' quails 'n' cottontails 'n' jacks 'n'—maybe uh few chickens. Can't tell fer sure 'bout th' chickens, 'cause they don't stay much in one place in th' winter, 'n'en they're pretty cute too 'n' hard to get up to. But th' quails

'n' the rest are all right, 'n' we can get all we want. Will yeh go?"

"Yes, if it snows I'm with you," I answered, for I felt like taking a trip with the gun, and was glad of any excuse that offered.

"Where'll we get a dog?"

"Huh! don't want no dog," the boy said, disdainfully.

"Dogs is uh nuisance. They run around sost yeh can't git uh thing 'less yeh juss happen to. I'll show yeh more game 'n' yeh can shoot, all right, an' I don't want uh dog neither. Take lots o' shells 'n' be ready for all day 'n' we'll go over among th' breaks by Stoll's place. Some good ground over there 'n' we can have uh bushel o' fun. I'll be ready 'bout half past seven 'n' come this way."

"All right, I'll be ready," I answered, and the boy said, "So long," as he disappeared in the fast-gathering darkness.

When morning came there was a fine tracking snow on the ground, and the boy and sunrise came together.

We shouldered our guns and plunder and hurried through the half-awake town, across the river and into the corn-clad hills, where the breaks ran back to the divide.

“We’ll go over along that hedge first,” said the boy. “You take one side ’n’ I’ll take th’ other, ’n’ we ought to git uh cottontail er two. Yeh see, they ain’t went to th’ brush, ’n’ they’re kind o’ hangin’ ’round their summer stompin’ grounds yet. When th’ snow gets uh little deeper they go to th’ brush ’n’ weed patches ’n’ corn-fields, ’n’en you got to hunt different. Look out now which way yeh shoot, ’n’ don’t shoot a tall unless yeh know where I am, ’n’ I’ll do th’ same.”

We walked along for a few hundred yards before the boy said, “Woap, I see one!” I stopped, and his gun boomed, tearing up the snow at the foot of the hedge where a lot of “tumble weed” had blown up and lodged against it.

The rabbit was killed sitting in his form, and as the boy went to pick him up a

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bunch of quail whirred up a little further ahead and went on down the hedge, pitching to the ground again within a couple of hundred yards.

"Gee!" said the boy. "Now we're goin' to have uh picnic, sure! They lit in th' hedge 'n' they'll git up scatterin', sost we can have wing shots at 'em one at uh time. That's th' way I like 'em. Now you take th' ones that git up on your side an' I'll take care o' th' ones on this side, 'n' we'll have some fun. Look out fer tracks too, 'cause some of 'em may run out in th' grass. Ready?"

"Yes, go ahead," I answered, "I'm with you."

Slowly we went to the place where the birds had pitched down, and suddenly "Whir-r" went one of them on my side, and so startled me that I forgot to shoot. "Why didn't yeh git him?" asked the boy, laughingly.

"Whir-r-r—bang!" on the boy's side. "Got him," he said, laconically, as he broke his gun and threw in a fresh shell.

“Now look out ’n’ when yeh see one, shoot whether yeh get ’im er not, ’n’ watch ’im down,” he added, musingly. In a few moments I rather enjoyed the unexpected rattle of wings and swift flight of the birds, and was blazing away as though I had shot that way all my life.

The boy’s gun was busy too, and when we counted heads at the end of the fence we had nine fine quail between us. I had missed as many as I had shot, and the boy gave me advice in this manner: “Yeh got t’ shoot snapshot; this way, see? Now th’ way I do is to go ’long with my gun down in both hands, my thumb on th’ hammer ’n’ my finger on th’ trigger, ’n’ when th’ bird gits up I juss watch th’ bird ’n’ jerk up th’ ole gun ’n’ blaze away. As I pull up, I cock it ’n’ touch th’ trigger as she touches my shoulder. That way yeh can’t hardly miss ’n’ it’s easy when yeh git th’ hang of it. Yer gun jumps t’ yer shoulder juss right on uh level with yer eye. So all yeh got t’

do is t' shoot 'n' down goes Mr. Quail. Juss as easy as eatin' pie."

"All right, I'll try and remember what you've told me," I answered, "though I expect to score a whole lot of misses before I get the hang of it."

We wandered along through several cornfields, and at last came to the edge of a piece of wild hay land.

A jack rabbit track struck out of the corn into the grass just where we came to the edge of it.

"Now we'll trail this feller up 'n' git 'im," said the boy. "Reckon he's strikin' fer home when he made these tracks." The boy took the trail, telling me to be ready "'cause he might git up a-runnin' any time."

Winding about through the knee-deep tangle of wild grass, we followed the trail, sometimes so broken by the snow that had fallen in it as to be nearly lost to any one but the boy, who followed it swiftly and walked with a long, easy stride.

Presently he stopped short and said:

“Now this feller was a-huntin’ uh place t’ sleep when he come out here, ’n’ he’s fooled around this way ’cause th’ snow hangs on th’ grass too much ’n’ he knows it’d come dribblin’ down all over him if he holed up ’nunder uh bunch in here. Now I reckon he’ll git disgusted purty soon ’n’ light out right ’crost too-ward that pasture over there ’n’ set down ’n under uh wad o’ bunch grass in there. Yeh see, th’ bunch grass don’t hold th’ snow like this blue stem does, ’n’ Mr. Rabbit knows it, ’n’ he’ll be mighty apt to be in that pasture, ’n’ not far in either. C’m on, less go git ’im.”

Again we followed the winding of the trail, and soon it struck a straight line, with long distances between the tracks, showing that the jack had fulfilled the boy’s predictions, based on his intimate knowledge of jack rabbits and what he read in the trail of this one’s doings.

We had just crawled through the barbed-wire fence that surrounded the pasture when a flurry of snow made a halo around

a bunch of grass, and out of it came the rabbit under full sail.

"Shoot!" said the boy, and my gun sounded a "hurry-up" call that had the effect of lengthening the distance the fleeing game made between his footprints. Like an echo the boy's gun cracked, and the jack did a combination handspring running fall, mixed indiscriminately with a dozen or so first-class somersaults, bringing up on his back with a thump, quite dead. That snap shot of his did it quickly and effectively.

We were now on top of the divide, and our tramp had so roused the inner man that lunch was decidedly the thing, and it was forthwith produced. We could see miles of country spread out in gentle rolling hills, white with the mantle of new snow, against which the dark lines of timber along the creeks and river wound in contrast. The winter sun shone with the prairie brilliancy and the air was just cold enough to be bracing. It was a day to tramp abroad and enjoy shooting—one of

those rare winter days that are as bracing as good wine.

Lunch disposed of, we struck out again through the withered fields of corn, across the tangle of wild grasses and through the weed patches that filled the bottoms of the breaks or draws. Cottontails scurried out and turned handsprings as the guns cracked, quail whirred up into the air and came down dead as the smoke curled from the muzzles, until the sun hung low and our hunting coats were stuffed with game.

"Less go home," said the boy at last, and then we pulled the shells out and slung our guns with straps over our shoulders so we could "hit the trail" without hindrance.

"Gee, I'm tired!" said the boy. "Never seem t' git tired tull I strike for home, 'n'en ever' step seems like it's harder'n th' last one, 'n' when I git home I'm plumb done up."

"Same here," I answered.

The sun hung like a ball of gold and reflected pink tints on the snow as we

crossed the river, sleeping under its icy coat, and climbed the hill into town, where the blue smoke spirals wound up from chimneys and savory odors came down the gentle evening air, as the busy housewives prepared the supper for tired men.

"Hello, been huntin'?" "Git anything?" inquired our acquaintances as we passed.

"Yep," answered the boy, and they all knew him well enough to know that he meant a good bag.

"Well, so long," said the boy, "lemme know when yeh run out o' meat. I know where we c'n git more."

"So long," I answered, turning in at the gate and walking up the broad path of light that made a ruddy glow on the creaking sidewalk.

WE GO A-FISHING

WHEN the snow banks had disappeared and the pussy willows were covered with little balls of bloom that looked strangely like white caterpillars, I met the boy on the way down town one morning.

“Hello! Say, gee! th’ spickerls (wall-eyed pike) ’r’ runnin’, ’n’ we c’n have uh picnic. Less go ’n’ git th’ fishin’ tackle, ’n’ have some fun, will yeh?”

He was all excitement, and eager to wet a line, after being kept away from fish by the ice of the winter.

“Are you sure they will bite this early?” I asked.

“Sure! I was juss down by the dam, ’n’ th’ water is all cleared up again, ’n’ I saw uh whole lot of ’em right at th’ east end. They wasn’t suckers er redhorse er buffalo, either; they was juss spickerls, ’n’ lots of ’em. Say, we c’n have more fun ’n’ uh box o’ monkeys—some ole Balaams

'mongst 'em, too. C'm on 'n git yer line, 'n' I'll hustle th' minnies, 'n' we'll sure git 'em!"

"All right, we'll go," I answered, for I was just as ready for a go at the pike-perch as he was, and if they bit at all I knew we would have good sport and get a mess of fine fresh fish—a welcome addition to the larder when you catch and dress them yourself, too.

"I'll meet yeh at th' dam," said the boy, as he started for his outfit in a regular boy hurry; and you know the busy man can never "get such a hustle" into his gait as an enthusiastic youth can communicate to his.

Shortly afterward I found him wading in the swirls that threatened to engulf his long rubber boots, working like a beaver to seine the needed bait. Minnows were scarce, but he soon had a couple of dozen in the bucket, and we clambered over the flume, white with the flour dust that sifted down from the rumbling mill on the bank.

“Now take yer line ‘n’ put juss uh little bit o’ sinker on’ ‘bout three feet from th’ hook, ‘n’en hook yer minnie sost he hangs straight ‘n’ nice, like he was alive,” said the boy.

“Yeh see,” he continued, “th’ swirls ‘n’ eddies down there ‘ll keep him a-wig-glin’ ‘round like he was a-swimmin’, ‘n’ when ol’ Mr. Spickerl sees him he juss opens that mouth o’ his, ‘n’ down goes yer bait, hook ‘n’ all. This time o’ year they ain’t quite so lively as they are ‘long ‘bout June, ‘n’ they kind o’ swim away slow ‘n’ don’t get hooked right at first, so yeh don’t want to be too quick ‘n’ pull it away from ‘em. When yeh see yer line begin to move crost th’ current kind o’ stiddy, juss let him go ‘n’ give him plenty o’ time, ‘n’en jerk kind o’—er don’t jerk a tall; juss give him kind o’ uh pull, sost to sock th’ hook into his mouth solid. If yeh jerk quick yer liable to jerk it away ‘n’ not git him, see?”

We had baited and cast into the boiling eddies under the fall of the dam, and sat

down on the stone pier waiting. A strong, fresh wind came up out of the south, bringing the perfume of the willow catkins, the bursting cottonwood buds, and that earthy smell of spring when the old world wakes up again.

The day was bright and warm; robins and bluebirds crossed the sky at intervals, bound north, or just house hunting there by the peaceful stream. The dull roar of the falling flood filled the air and sung a monotonous chant that somehow goes well with fishing.

“Yeh got one!” said the boy.

My line was moving out steadily across the foam-flecked current, and I let it go forty or fifty feet, then struck as I would for bass. Instantly the line tightened and began to sing through the swift water as the reel screamed and the rod bowed to the strain.

“I got one, too!” was the boy’s next remark, as he scrambled down on top of the dam, so we would not foul each other. I was too busy to watch the boy, and he

had landed his with a long-handled net before I got mine where he couldn't fight. When I brought him to the top, the boy landed him for me, and we had a pair, each of about four and a half pounds.

"Gee! this is th' right kind," said the boy, as he baited again and cast for another chance in the river lottery. One by one they struck and fought a vain fight, until our string grew long and heavy, while the boy's eyes shone and a healthy outdoor flush tinted his beardless face—enjoyment personified, if I ever saw it.

Several five and six pounders had been vanquished, and we were thinking of going home, when the boy struck again and then yelled: "Gee! I've got uh whale!"

Sure enough, his rod was see-sawing furiously, and the reel screamed above the roar of the flood as his fish rushed into the current and far out into the river, in spite of the drag.

The boy fought him coolly enough until the great fish leaped out of the water a hundred feet away, giving us a momentary

glimpse of what the boy called the "daddy of all the spickerls," and then became so excited that he stepped to near the edge of the dam and went over the plank "apron" that pitched, moss covered and slimy, to the river below.

Luckily the water only trickled over the top just here, and was only about waist deep below. Almost before the water that flew up as he dropped in had reached its level the boy bobbed up, scrambled to his feet and began reeling in his line as he stood there, waist deep in the cold water, dripping, shivering, but full of fight and anxious to get his fish.

When he found he still had his fish hooked he let out a yell and scrambled up on a little rocky shelf that jutted out from the pier foundation, and then got down to the business of fighting that big pike.

Time and again he got him up only to have him rush away at a speed that threatened wreck for the rod, reel and line. The boy said nothing, but fought like a general, eyes and hands working

together in cool precision that was a joy to the onlooker.

I had climbed down the niches in the stone pier, and stood ready with the net as soon as the fish should come within reach. Several times I saw him rush through the water under me, and each time his dark length seemed longer, and I began to think he would surely get away, just because he was the "big one."

At last he came within reach, broke water and lashed out with his broad tail in two or three exhausted, weak splashes; the net shot under and raised him, a gasping captive, still snapping his fanged jaws, and flashing fight from his big eyes.

Then the boy went wild. "Yip, yip, hooray! Gee! yip! yip!" he said, dancing around in the deeper water, where he had slipped in his excitement, and gone under again with a gurgle as he disappeared.

He forgot about the cold, about being soaked, about everything except his fish, and I had to talk to him five minutes

before he understood that he would have to wade around the flume and carry the fish that way while I brought the rest over the top.

When we got together on the bank we voted unanimously that this fish was a sure whale, and that we had enough. Rods were quickly unjointed and packed, and then we went up town to hunt a pair of scales.

Sixteen pounds strong was the verdict, and the fish looked half as much more. No one in town had ever heard of one as large being caught in the stream, and I believe it is the record fish yet in this Western river, for times are changing and fish growing smaller there each year.

This stream waters one continuous farm now from source to mouth, and the black soil has made a slimy, muddy bottom and a murky flood where only suckers and bullheads dwell, instead of the clear, swift-flowing river that was there babbling along over its rocky bed when the boy caught the "daddy of all the spickerls."

JUST A LAZY AFTERNOON

ONE Saturday in June the boy walked into the shed where I was painting a new canoe, sauntered around the boat and inspected it with critical eye, squinting aft from the bow and "lining up" the bends.

"Good job that. Got 'er 's even as one 'n' one. Ought to be uh gickaloodin traveler."

"Ought to be what?" I asked.

"A gickaloodin traveler. Don't yeh know what that means?" he answered with a grin.

"No, I never heard that before."

"Well, that's th' same as good, only it's better," he replied. "Learnt that from a nold feller that ust to live down on th' Missouri River, name o' Poo Gee. He ust to always say 'Poo Gee!' ever' time 'at he felt like swearin', 'n' that's how he got

his name. Dunno what his reel name was, er nobody else, I guess. Ever'budy juss called him Poo Gee. He had uh lot o' names fer things, like gickaloodin 'stead o' good, 'n' joistaboomerang fer uh floatin' log. 'N' one o' these logs 'at seesaws up 'n' down in uh current he called uh joisticutis, 'n'en uh pine timber he called uh pine joistus.

"He 's uh queer ole feller, 'n' 'bout half crazy, I guess; but he knowed how to fish 'n' hunt aw right, 'n' lived in uh kind o' shanty down there', fishin' fer market."

"Well, he must be a character."

"Oh, he's dead now," answered the boy.

"Say," he said, changing the subject, "less go out 'n th' woods 's afternoon, will yeh? I'm feelin' kind o' lazy 'n' no account like, 'n' want to go somers. Don't want to go fishin' 'n' hain't nothin' to shoot, but I juss got uh resless notion I want to go out 'n th' timber. If I hook up 'n' come over after dinner, will yeh go 'long?'"

"Yes, I guess so. We might take the rods along and fish some too," I suggested.

"Nope," he answered, "don't want to fish, juss want to lazy 'round in th' shade somers where they ain't nobody to bother."

"All right," I answered, laughing. "If that's the way you feel I'll just go and loaf away a half day too."

"Aw right, then, I'll be over 'bout one with th' buggy. So long."

Then he sauntered up the walk, one hand thrust deep in his trousers pocket and his broad hat tilted at a dangerous angle over his right eye; under the flecking shadows of the grape arbor and out of sight, strolling lazily, but with the easy grace that is as natural as breathing to the outdoor man.

It is health and unconscious strength that makes the springing step and the easy, supple roll in the gait—a mark that nature puts on her gentlemen.

In the early afternoon we drove out into the country, past the growing crops, past the shady hedges, past the farmhouses

where busy housewives hastened through their many occupations, oftentimes accompanying their movements with simple song, not very musical, it is true, but from satisfied minds that helped lighten labor.

The farmhouse dogs ran out as we passed, and fretted themselves unnecessarily, barking until we were well away from the house. We drove contentedly and unmindful of these things, chatting in a lazy way befitting the day and the trip, the boy pointing out places along the route where he had had sport with the shotgun in other days.

A butcher bird flitted out of the hedge and across the road, alighting on a barbed wire fence. The boy's quick eye noted that the bird carried a burden, so he pulled up the horse and we sat watching.

The bird eyed us suspiciously for a few moments, and then, satisfied that we meant no evil, deliberately impaled his burden on a barb, flicked his beak with a

sidewise motion on the wire, and winged his way across the field.

"Know what he was doin'?" asked the boy.

"No, I'm not up in that fellow's ways," I answered.

"He's hangin' up his supply o' grub. See, he's got uh lot o' truck strung along th' wire. Whoa, Bill! Less go over 'n' see what he's got."

We jumped out and inspected the wire, finding two mice, some big brown crickets and nearly a dozen big grasshoppers, besides some other insects of the beetle variety.

"See, he's layin' in uh stock o' grub," said the boy. "Now yeh'd think he'd eat all o' them things after he went to th' trouble o' ketchin' 'em 'n' hangin' 'em up, wouldn't yeh?"

"Yes, I would think so," I answered.

"Well, he don't," said the boy. "At least he don't always, 'cause I've found this kind o' uh layout right 'n winter, 'n' everything on th' wire'd be as dry as

powder, 'n' uh mouse 'd starve tryin' to live off of 'em. These butcher birds, shreeks er shrikes er somep'n like that, I b'leeve is th' right name of 'em, seems juss to have uh leanin' too-words killin' things 'n' leavin' 'em stuck 'round this way. They are cur'ous kind o' birds, anyways."

The boy went on enlightening me on the ways of butcher birds as we circled toward the river. We soon went into the gate and through the blue grass pasture, where the big walnut trees grew in the sandy flood-washed soil of the river bank.

"Here's uh good place. Less stop," said the boy, and out he leaped, unhooked the horse, slipped his bridle and turned him loose. We stretched at length on the dry sand that the last rise in the river had left there in the shade of the huge walnut trees, and I filled my pipe for a smoke, while the boy folded his hands behind his head, elevated one knee over the other as he lay flat on his back, slowly chewing a grass stem and looking up

through the meshed tangle of leaves at the white clouds floating lazily across the blue dome.

“Gee, it’s uh long ways up to them clouds, ain’t it?” he said. “I’d like to go up ’n uh balloon er somp’n ’n’ look down at the ground. Bet it’d look funny fr’m way up there, ’n’en uh feller could see uh nawful long ways too. Reckon he could see most to the Missouri River, couldn’t he?”

“Perhaps,” I answered. “But I rather think he couldn’t see much even if he could see that far. It is about sixty miles to the river in an air line, and in this atmosphere everything would be lost in a haze. In the mountain country you can see that far easily, for you are up in the air and everything else is too, so the haze don’t bother much.”

“Say, gee! I’d like to go to th’ mountains. It must be uh nawful purty place, ’n’en, gee! couldn’t uh feller have fun ketchin’ trout ’n’ shootin’ deer ’n’ things! But it’s uh nawful long ways, ’n’ I don’t

reckon I'll ever git there," he continued, as the smile faded and a dreamy, far-away look came into his bright eyes.

"Oh, I don't know, it wouldn't be such a long journey even with a team and wagon," I answered. "Three or four weeks would take you from here to Denver, and another week would take you right into the hills."

"Gee! less go!" said the boy.

"Well, we can think of that later, and arrange for a hunt that way this fall, perhaps," I answered.

"I'll juss go yeh."

The boy was no longer indifferent and "feelin' lazy," but was alert and talking like an old woman's tea party about the mountains and the great stretch of sun-burned plains that met the sky to the westward of the little river. The sun swung across the blue dome and the shadows reached from bank to bank across the stream before his excitement cooled down enough to think of going home.

When I suggested that we move, he

tilted his hat down over his eyes, squinted at the low-hanging sun and slowly rose to his feet. Gathering up the bridle, he whistled to the black pony and stood waiting for him to come up. The pony understood him, too, and came slowly along, nibbling at a tender bunch of grass here and there, reluctant, but knowing that the boy's will was law, and soon he stood hitched to the buggy and ready for the homeward drive.

Back along the country roads we went, the pony suiting himself as to gait, while we chatted and enjoyed the ride, noting the passing landscape and the wild things that were the life of that perfect evening—truly one of those “rare June days.”

FLOATING AND FISHING ON THE RIVER

WHEN I came home the boy was waiting for me, curled up in a jack-knife attitude, his back against the fence and his broad hat pulled down to shade his eyes while he industriously whittled a stick and chewed one of the pungent pine shavings.

"Gee! 'Thought yeh wasn't comin' 't all," he said, as he arose and snapped his knife shut against his trousers leg.

"I'm goin' up river in th' mornin'. Goin' to nose 'round where some beaver bin a-workin' up there. Want to kinder figger on how many pelts I c'n corral when fur gits good this fall, yeh know. Want to go 'long?"

"Sure," I answered. "I feel just like taking a trip anyhow."

"Aw right. Goin' to start early sost to git away fr'm the sun all we can. 'Bout daylight I reckon'd be uh good time. Be ready then, will yeh?"

"Yes," I answered, "I'll meet you at the boat at dawn. Will we take any guns or fishing tackle?"

"Dunno; nuthin' to shoot, but we c'n do some fishin', I reckon. Oh, say, I know—gee! course we can! I got 'bout fifteen er twenty jug lines down at th' landin', 'n' we'll jug back!"

"All right; I don't know anything about jugging, but if you do we'll try it. I'll bring lunch for both of us, then, and meet you in the morning."

"Aw right; so long!" said the boy, as he started home.

"Say," he called back, "be sure 'n' be down t' th' river by daylight?"

"Yes."

When the gray dawn came we were afloat on the silent river. The little canoe scarcely made a ripple on the glassy surface as we slipped along swiftly as may be, two good, stout paddles urging the little craft forward against the sluggish back-water above the dam.

Little curls of vapor seemed to hang like

smoke against the water, and curious little, oily, wavy places showed where a sunken snag neared the surface. A home-hurrying muskrat marked a wrinkly path across the current and dived as we neared him.

Blackbirds chattered among the willows or flew with swift beating wings and trailing tail rudders across the tinted sky.

"Say," said the boy, without turning his head, "this here's uh heap th' nicest part of uh day, ain't it? If it'd juss stay this way forever I don't reckon Paradise'd beat it uh heap, d'you? Look at them fool blackbirds, fightin' like uh couple o' kids over somp'n 'r other! Smell th' trees, huh? Can't smell 'em on'y on still summer mornin's, early, this way, jever nodiss it? Seems like when th' sun comes up it sort o' soaks up th' smell like, 'n'en it's all gone. I like th' early mornin' better'n any part o' th' day, don't you?"

"I agree with you exactly," I said, and mentally noted that this young savage had a good deal that was poetic about him, in

a rough way, and enjoyed and appreciated the beauties—those untellable beauties—of old Dame Nature in her varying moods. It struck me that this likening of the tranquil summer morning to Paradise was a homely expression of enjoyment to the fullest extent, innocent, healthy and satisfied enjoyment that lacked any thought of animal viciousness, and to this day I have never found a more fitting description than his.

In time the sun came up, painting the few clouds with all the tints in Nature's color box, and then settled down to the business of warming the world and painting the colors all out again.

The canoe never slacked its even progress, forging ahead under the shadow of the trees until the mist left the water and a cooling breeze rippled the quiet surface into tiny wavelets.

When noon came the boy said we had reached the beaver grounds, and we went ashore.

The boy carefully inspected the cut-off

stumps of the willows, looked long and carefully at the flat, webbed tracks in the mud, and hunted "sign" for an hour, while I sat in the shade and smoked, waiting until he should return.

"I reckon they's about nine or ten beaver here that's good fer fur this fall," he said, as he sprawled beside me on the grass.

"They's uh pair o' old ones 'n' two er three litters o' kittens o' different sizes, I figger. I'm goin' to have them pelts when frost comes, too, you bet.

"Gee! Less eat. I'm hungrier'n uh bear. Funny how uh feller gits so onreasonable hungry knockin' 'round this way, ain't it?" he said, with a smile, as we opened the lunch.

"I got th' jugs 'n' uh few frogs down there 'n th' canoe, 'n' I reckon we c'n float down with th' current 'n' let th' jugs do th' fishin' 'safternoon, 'n' have some fun too. Got to ketch s'more hoptoads, though, first," he added, as he stowed away the remnant of a sandwich and went

for the little tin bucket to get water from the spring near by.

"Say, that's th' best drink 't ever was invented, ain't it?" he remarked, as he came back with the bucket brimful of cold and good water from the spring that welled up among the rocks of "Stony Point."

"Seems like white folks want to kill 'erselves drinkin' all kinds o' whisky 'n' beer 'n' stuff like that when they's s'much good water juss runnin' to waste. I can't juss figger such things out myself."

We loafed about in the shade talking and resting for an hour, while the young philosopher tried to "figger out" the problem of humanity just as philosophers have thought and wondered and "figgered" since time began, and like them the boy finally "give it up," and turned to the immediate business of catching frogs for fish bait.

I stretched at length along the grass, lazily watching the swallows flit in and out

of the burrows in the bluffs across the river, wondering why these little creatures had been so constructed that they could annihilate distance so easily, while man must plod slowly along up hill and down over the surface of this old world.

The soft lullaby of the wind-tuned trees lulled one to the quietude of mind necessary for building air castles, and soon I was dreaming there by the quiet river. I saw without seeing. I was there, and yet knew nothing of the surroundings—just thinking.

A big black ant crawfished across a bit of sand, exerting every energy to drag a dead grasshopper to his storehouse. A black wasp nervously opened and closed its steely wings, and after inspecting its surroundings vanished.

The midday sun flecked the ground with a network of ever-moving shadows, weaving in and out, blending with the flowers and grasses of the bank.

“Say, yeh goin’ to snooze all day? Git uh hike on yeh ’n’ c’mon. Got to move

if we ketch any catties 'safternoon. I got lots o' bait, so less go."

The boy had broken the spell, and soon we were drifting lazily, contentedly along behind a row of corked-up beer bottles and small jugs that floated in "company front" with the current of the prairie river.

Birds flitted in and out among the trees; an occasional squirrel could be seen stretched at length along a gnarled oak limb, just soaking himself full of sunshine—or perhaps he would be nosing about among the fallen leaves on the ground, his tail curled up over his back and waving like a great brown plume.

Turtles basked on the dead snags and plunked off into the water as we floated by. Everything was living and enjoying life in its own peculiar way, and over all was the brilliant blue of the prairie sky, the flood of light from the summer sun, and just enough warmth to make us too lazy to even talk as we drifted on the slow current, following the line of jugs and bottles down the western river.

Suddenly the boy gathered himself together, dipped deep with his paddle, and the canoe began to move swiftly toward one of the jugs that was bobbing, spinning and plowing through the water in circles, as a heavy fish tried vainly to rid himself of the hook.

"Say, gee! that's uh Balaam, sure!" said the boy quietly, as we watched the antics of the bobbing jug.

As we neared it the jug sank, and a few moments later reappeared forty feet away, swirling through the water as the fish towed it along.

"You work her, 'n' I'll git that Balaam," said the boy, as he laid his paddle inboard and got ready for action when we should get within reach of the jug.

I handled the canoe, and in a few moments got alongside, where the boy got hold of the line and began to fight the fish on his own ground.

Several times the broad tail curved up and threw a shower of water over the boy,

and several times the boy caught his breath and said, "Ugh!" but he hung on, and in the end pulled the big blue-black catfish over the gunwale of the canoe.

"Good un, ain't he?" said the boy, contentedly, as he slipped a string through the fish's gills and hung him overboard.

Soon the jug was rebaited and drifting along with its fellows, and behind the line was the black canoe with its counterfeit reflected upside down in the quiet stream, drifting, drifting with the slow current, while the boy and I reclined along the bottom and up against the "lazy-back" seat, waiting and drifting there in the quiet of the summer afternoon.

WHAT HAPPENED IN CAMP

THREE days had passed since the boats had crawled up against the current of the little western river until they grounded against the hot edge of a great sandbar.

Just here the river swept around in a broad curve, washing and cutting away the bluff on one side and forming the bar on the other as the aggressive current advanced.

A fine open growth of timber back of the bar made a good camp ground, and a clear spring boiled up through the gravel to supply the best of water.

The white canvas, more or less stained by camp usage, had gleamed among the trees these three days, and furnished a home for the boy and me when we came in from our rambles through the enchanted woods or floated back in the black canoe with the water that forever passed by, steadily, resistlessly moving on, on, on.

Where it came from, where it went, were two things to which we gave no thought. It was always there, and it was the home of the fish, the ducks and the many other things that made life a day of joy for us.

Strange things came down on the ever-moving current; some went by, some stranded on our sandbar and furnished a moment of wonderment and vague conjecture as we saw them—and left them there.

There were fragments of stone on the bar, too, rocks that were strangers in the prairie country, and a constant source of wonder to the boy, who continually brought them into the tent to ask their history. Sometimes I had to wonder with him, and could give no information, because the rock was a stranger to me, too,—a stray pebble that had started—where?

At times the youngster would toss a bit of water-smoothed stone down beside me, drop to the ground himself and stretch on his stomach, his chin resting on his

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crossed arms, and broad hat tilted back while he waited and listened to the probable history of the fire-born, ice-milled, water-moved bit of rock that had traveled hundreds of miles and stranded on "agate bar" for the boy to find.

This rock lore was full of mountain voices, tales of the great, lonely country that basked in the sun to the westward; stories of the ruins of that part of the world called "bad lands"; of crystal streams that hid flakes of gold in their sands and trout in their waters; of pine woods where wild animals roamed; and of other talk of the wilderness.

It was just the beginning of Indian summer when we camped by the sandbar, that delightful time in the year when one may dream all day and every day; and it had its effect on the boy.

He was preoccupied, thinking, dreaming, looking into the haze that dimmed the western horizon.

"Say, less take uh trip to the mountains, will yeh?"

He had decided on a plan of action, and wanted my indorsement and company.

I smiled, lighted my pipe, and sat down for a talk. I had already seen the backbone of the continent and the withering, soul-killing country where the gray sage grows, where the loafer wolves howl like lost souls, where the ghoulish buzzard floats in the clear air, where death lurks in the water and the blistered, alkali-strewn ground.

All afternoon I sat there and told the boy of this lost country and of the great hills that pierced the sky to the west of it, while he listened and dreamed.

“Less go, will yeh?” he said, when I had finished.

“Less git th’ outfit together ’n’ light out this fall. I’m tired o’ this old level country where they ain’t nothin’ on’y th’ river ’n’ th’ woods, ’n’ juss catfish. I want to git up amongst th’ rocks ’n’ snow ’n’ pine woods—’n’ I’m goin’, too.”

“Well, if you’re set on going, we had better wait till spring, so the grass will

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furnish feed for the horses, anyhow. You can't travel far out there in the fall when the grass is dead and the water holes all dried up. Then again, you would no more than get to the hills before you would have to hurry back to get home ahead of the snow."

"Guess yer right," he answered, with a sigh. "Haff to wait, I reckon. Will yeh go in th' spring, shore?"

"Unless something turns up this winter to prevent it, I will go in the spring and stay all summer if you like. We can take along a prospecting outfit and maybe locate some color worth working, too; there is plenty of it in the hills, if you can find it, and it will give us an excuse for going, anyhow."

So it was settled there by the little western river, settled and all winter left for anticipation, which I have begun to think is more real pleasure than the trip, whether it be around the world or only an afternoon off for fishing.

The boy could always find some new

interest hovering over the country we were to visit, and the questions he asked were as many and varied as the cottonwood leaves that sang in the breeze over our heads.

First it was to be a wagon and team, then this would be abandoned as the superior advantages of a pack-horse outfit were discussed; then the limited capacity of such an outfit would throw his opinion back to the wagon idea again.

So the discussion went, back and forth and back again, until I said: "Let's go fishing and let the trip rest while we are in camp. We've got all winter to think it over, and when the time comes we'll be ready all right, and with the right kind of an outfit, too."

"Yep, reckon we sure will," he answered, as he gathered up the rods and canoe paddles and got ready for a short hour of enjoyment before night should put out the light of the sun.

"They must be some mighty nice places out there 'n th' mountains," said the boy,

as we drifted and cast our minnows toward the rocks along the bank where we knew the big pike-perch balanced and waited.

"I've always wanted to see th' mountains ever since I first heard about 'em, 'n' I got a idee I could juss live 'round 'mongst them rocks 'n' trees 'n' things all th' res o' my life 'thout botherin' uh heap 'bout anything much.

"Gee! they muss be high. Less see—12,000 feet—how much is uh mile? Five thousand two hunnerd 'n' eighty—that's right—into 12,000—that's twice and 'bout uh quarter over, ain't it? Gee! Juss think! Two mile 'n' uh quarter straight up 'n th' air! Whew! Say, that's as far's fr'm town clean to th' stone quarries down th' river. I bet them red clouds ain't that high right now. Must make uh feller feel kinder queer like to git up that high 'n' look down, don't it?"

"Well, it would perhaps if you could look straight down, but you must remember that the hills begin to rise a long way from the peaks, and the country up there

isn't so much different from any other rough country until you get to the pinacles. Then it is mostly rocks piled up into needles and gashed and split into canyons that make it pretty hard to get through; the rest of it is only one hill piled on top of another for miles."

"Huh! Pictures o' mountains don't look that way. They look like they run right up from uh flat country like this—that is, gene'lly they do."

"Well," I replied, "when you are twenty or twenty-five miles away the hills look that way too; but they are different when you get there."

"Kin you ride—gee! I got uh whale, I guess."

A big "spickerl" had coupled on to the boy's hook and cut further discussion about the mountains short for the evening, for the sun was gone and there was only a red glow in the western sky when the big fish came in over the side and quivered in his last gasp on the bottom of the canoe.

"Less have him fer supper, will yeh?"

asked the youngster as he surveyed the catch.

“All right, I’m fish hungry myself, and he will make a good supper for both,” I answered.

“Yep, less go to camp ’n’ git him a-sizzlin’.”

Rods were tucked away in the canoe and the whispering paddles crooned a lullaby as the black canoe cut the surface of the river, wrinkling the red and gold reflections of the sunset into a thousand scintillating prisms of color that flickered from the brown sands of Agate Bar to the blue shadows reaching out from the foot of the bluff across the stream.

As the glow faded from the sky and the blue-black shades of night came on, our little fire burned merrily and grew hot and red against the night, half illuminating the white tent and penciling the overhanging cottonwood limbs in lines of light.

The big pike sputtered and grew brown, the coffee complained and bubbled against the hot sides of the pot, and other things

gave odors to whet the outdoor man's appetite, until we sat down to a hungry, healthy man's fare there by the silent river, at the end of another day that we had lived—one day in a life that has passed to the shades of recollection now, for that was long ago, and in a country that has now become only a part of the traditions of what was once the great, limitless West.

A DOWN-STREAM JOURNEY

THE old black canoes had served their time and were not worth keeping over winter.

Their canvas sides had fallen into that "touchy" condition which ends the usefulness of canvas as a boat material, and the tough elm ribs had become water-soaked and lame from hard usage.

The boy and I drydocked these two little cruisers, overhauled them from stem to stern, added a few touches of paint, a brace here and there, and then concluded they would last until the "glass" ice should form on the river.

"Say, I'll tell yeh what less do," said the youngster, "less git our outfit 'n' float down th' river far as we can 'fore it freezes; 'n'en let th' canoes go 'n' come back on th' train, will yeh?"

I smoked over this idea a little while,

and thought about the ducks, snipe, squirrels and fish that lived along the little river.

Then there were the glorious mornings, the hazy days of Indian summer, when one wants to do nothing but float, float, float all day long—float until the painted sky blazes across the west and it is time for a blue wisp of smoke to twist upward through the red and yellow leaves.

A-a-a-nah! my tillicums, those are days of joy, and I saw many such days as I mentally reviewed the winding length of river that twisted among the hills to the southeast until it came to the yellow flood of the old Missouri, two hundred miles away.

“Yes, I will float on the river with you until the ice stops us or until there is no more river to float on,” I answered.

It did not take more than a couple of days to prepare for the voyage, and it was with a satisfied feeling of enjoyment that we pushed out into the current that hurries away from the dam where the boy caught his “spickerl.”

“We’d ought to make twenty er twenty-five mile ’fore sundown, hadn’t we?” asked the boy.

“See here, son, you must want to cut this voyage short, or else go clear to the Gulf. Why not take it easy? We’ve only got a matter of two hundred miles to go to get to the Missouri, and that old river is good for nothing but sturgeon and shovel-nosed catfish, which we as sportsmen and voyagers on discovery bent want nothing to do with.”

The boy smiled a queer little smile, and said: “Huh! guess yer right.”

We put a little bit of good, outdoor muscle on the paddles as we shot through the shallow riffles below the dam, and left a rippling wake through the “still hole” that ran past the big walnut trees and ended at the island where I first met the boy.

“That’s where I snagged that old Balaam first time I tried yer rod. Gee! I had uh picnic that day! Wonder I didn’t bu’st yer tip, wasn’t it?” the boy said, as

we slid down the boiling riffle and passed the bridge pier in midstream.

We were still in town and had two more bridges to pass before we should run out of the settlements, and we were anxious to get into the wilds.

“Pisht! pisht!” said the double blades, as we glided on down the shadow-flecked current, and the gurgle under the bow sang the travel song that is dear to every canoeist.

The bridges were a mile behind when we shot around a sharp curve at the foot of a rifle, and brought consternation to a troop of girls who, clad in old, discarded dresses, were splashing about in the shallow stream, trying to make themselves believe they were swimming.

Immediately there was a skurrying into the bushes, as these soaked mermaids went up the bank helter-skelter, frightened out of a year's growth by the appearance of these two silent black shapes on the swift current.

We caught a fleeting glance of a bit of

"local color" too, as one of the girls went into the bushes like a scared rabbit.

Her bathing costume was a suit of bright red underwear. No wonder she ran!

After the excitement died out, and the titters and little screams had lost themselves astern, the boy looked back over his shoulder and grinned as only a homely boy can.

"Funny, wasn't it, huh?" he asked.

As we turned the bend a mile below we noted that same scarlet note of color just at the river edge, and the boy grinned again.

Riffles and long reaches of still water slid under the keels as we journeyed on, until a bunch of cedar trees loomed blue through the other timber.

"Did I ever tell yeh how Deacon Lowe got scart out o' camp down here at th' cedars?" asked the boy.

"No, I don't think so," I replied.

The boy laughed in his throaty, chuckling way, and began the yarn.

"I was campin' down here 'lone one summer, 'n' Deacon he wanted to come 'long. I says, 'Aw right,' 'n' so Deacon come down with me one day when I went to town fer supplies.

"We was here two er three days, 'n' one night 'bout sundown Deacon heard uh Bob White whistlin' up on th' bluff above camp, where they's uh grove o' little jack oaks.

" 'Go 'n' git him, Deacon,' I says, 'n' Deacon took my ole Sary 'n' went.

" 'Purty soon, 'boom!' she went, 'way off 'mong th' trees, 'n' I figgered Deacon'd sure got that quail.

" 'After a while he comes into camp with th' quail, 'n' looking kind o' funny 'n' pale.

" 'What's up, Deacon?' I says, 'n' he says: 'They's uh graveyard up there right above camp, on th' bluff, d'yeh know that?'

" I laffed 'n' says: 'Yes, what o' that?'

" 'Deacon says: 'Yeh goin' to stay here when yeh know that?'

“ ‘Sure,’ I says; ‘graveyards can’t hurt yeh none, ’n’ ’sides that, ain’t I been here for two er three weeks, ’n’ no ghost ain’t come into camp yet?’

“That kinder stuck Deacon, ’n’ he didn’t say nothin’ more ’bout it while we eat supper, but he kep’ lookin’ toowords that graveyard kind o’ uneasy when it begin to git dark.

“Fin’ly he says: ‘I’m sick.’

“ ‘What’s th’ matter?’ I says, ’n’ he couldn’t tell, on’y ’at he was sick.

“ ‘Well,’ I says, ‘you stay ’n camp here ’n’ I’ll go ’n’ ’tend to the boats, ’n’en if yeh feel worse I’ll git uh horse ’n’ buggy ’n’ take yeh to town.’

“So I went down to where th’ boat was tied, ’n’ by gee! there was ’bout uh dozen folks come down with uh horse ’n’ wagon to fish all night.

“I told ’em I had uh sick pardner, ’n’ one feller says: ‘Where is he? I’m uh doctor,’ he says, ‘ ’n’ my medsun case is in th’ wagon.’

“So he got his medsun, ’n’en we went

up to camp, 'n' gee! they wasn't no Deacon there!

"I thought that was funny, 'n' I commenced to git scart, cos I thought mebbey Deacon'd got out o' his head 'n' went a-trailin' int' th' woods right at night.

" 'N'en I happened to think 'bout that graveyard, 'n' I says: 'Wait uh minnit;' 'n' I run up on t' th' railroad 'n' looked toowords town, 'n' there was Deacon hittin' th' trail like he was in a nawful hurry.

" 'N'en I kind o' savied like 'n' knowed th' Deacon was juss scart 'bout th' graveyard tull he thought he was sick, 'n' so I told th' doctor 'bout th' graveyard, 'n' he laffed 'n' said: 'Prob'ly that was all 't ailded Deacon.'

" 'N' sure 'nuff, it was, too, 'cause Deacon wouldn't come back to camp with me when I went to town next day. 'Huh, uh,' he says; 'no graveyard camps 'n mine,' he says; 'n'en I told th' ress o' th' fellers 'n town 'bout it, 'n' Deacon gits it 'bout bein' ghost sick yet sometimes.

“Say,” with a squint at the low-hanging sun, “less camp there to-night; they’s a good place, ’n’ lots o’ fish ’n’ th’ bess spring in th’ country ’bout uh hunderd yards fr’m camp. What d’yeh say?”

“All right.”

And strange to say, no ghosts molested us, though we could have tossed a stone into the burial ground with its old graves, long since fallen in and choked with dank weeds that hid the little weather-beaten crosses placed to mark a loved one’s last camp, long ago.

There was a melancholy air over that little spot of sacred ground there on the slope of hillside where the jack oaks grew, and I wondered what scenes of sorrow had been ended there in days that were older than I, as I read the weather-worn chisel marks that told of youth and old age at rest under the few modest slabs of plain marble that gleamed white among the crosses.

“Purty place up here, ain’t it?” said the boy, looking across the landscape, as

we wound our way down the bluff and into camp, and left the cedars to sigh over the deserted, unnoticed graves.

A RACE WITH A PRAIRIE FIRE

THE second morning of our river trip found a lazy pair of voyagers, I am afraid, for the sun was up and sending long, level beams of light in among the restless maple leaves overhead before we opened our eyes and looked out of the tent.

A great maple had been bent down by the ice or snow when it was a sapling, and had grown into a great hump-backed tree that described half a circle in front of camp.

Two squirrels were playing on this freak of timber that bright morning, racing up and down, bounding from limb to limb, chasing each other round and round the trunk with a reckless disregard for the laws of gravitation and the safety of their own necks, such as squirrels only are capable of exhibiting.

I watched them with keen interest as they went through their antics, and I must

say that I saw more of the animal instinct for fun that morning than I ever saw before.

“Hain’t they cute little fellers?” whispered the boy, who had also been aroused by the clatter of the squirrels, and was peering over my shoulder.

“Seems like it’s wicked to shoot such things, don’t it?” he continued. “Gee! I thought that ’n’ ’d sure fall that time! Funny how they c’n ketch onto uh little twig ’ith one foot that way ’n’ not fall clean down t’ th’ ground, ain’t it?”

Something frightened our performers, and with a final skurry and wave of plumes they vanished into the upper limbs of a near-by cottonwood, and the woods resumed their wonted quiet, with only the bird voices to mingle with the rustling whisper of the leaves.

“Less git up an’ git uh hike on us,” said the youthful savage by my side, as he kicked the blankets flying and came to his feet with a bound—the spontaneous elasticity of youth coupled with a perfect

condition of mental and bodily health—you know that is as much a part of a growing boy as his hands or his freckles.

“Why should one grow old?” I mused. “Why not always remain as healthy, happy, vigorous and youthful as that boy?” Yet I knew that the time would come when that supple frame, now so buoyant, would be stiff and bent, and then this day that we were living would be only the ghost of a mind, something to dream about in the warm sun, and that the old man with the bent body and weak eyes would look back—look at himself as he appeared to me to-day—and perhaps sigh and wish the old days back again.

“Say, what’s the matter ’ith you ’s mornin’? Gettin’ lazy er homesick a’ready?” asked the boy, with a merry laugh, as he saw me still reclining on the blankets and looking intently into a spot of sunshine on the ground.

He was busy with a fish just out of water, while I dressed and began packing the blankets out to a sunny place.

“Say, here, you watch this fish ’n’ these taters, sost they won’t burn. I’m goin’ t’ th’ spring ’n’ get some water fer coffee. Don’t yeh burn that fish ’n’ spoil it now, tinkerin’ round a-lookin’ ’t squirrels ’n’ things—won’t git no breakfust if yeh do!” And away he went, swinging the black coffeepot and whistling merrily.

When he came back his face wore a look of seriousness and apprehension.

“Say! smell th’ grass smoke in th’ air? I b’leeve they’s uh big fire somers down th’ river. Been purty dry, ’n’ grass’s mostly dead now, sost it’d burn gickaloodin if it got started.

“Wind’s ’n th’ south, ’n’ comin’ up ’ith th’ sun, ’n’ I bet sompin’s a-burnin’ down ahead of us.”

“Well, what if it is? We are on the river, and the fire couldn’t do us any harm even if there is one,” I answered.

“Dunno ’bout that,” he replied. “I seen fires round here ’at ’ud jump clean crost th’ river.

“Give ’em uh good haff uh gale o’ wind,

'n' th' river don't 'mount t' much toowords stoppin' 'em.

"'N' it gits s' hot 'at yeh can't stay nowheres, 'n' smoke's s' thick yeh can't breathe hardly.

"I seen s' many o' these big fires 'at I don't like 'em, 'n' they allus make me nervous some."

"Oh, I guess we're all safe enough, even if a big one comes along," I answered.

"Well, now, I tell yeh," said the youngster, with a sniff in the air. "It's on'y 'bout three mile fr'm here t' Iron Mountain, 'n' that's a mighty good place to git away fr'm fire, if one comes 'long. Less pack up 'n' go down there, 'n'en climb up 'n' look round 'ith th' glass.

"If they's uh fire 'ithin twenty er thirty mile o' here we c'n see it fr'm th' ole mountain all right.

"They's uh lot of limestone gulches down there where little creeks come tumblin' int' th' river, 'n' I reckon uh feller c'd git away fr'm fire there if he could anywhere."

"Very well," I answered, "we can stop there as well as not, and see how things look, anyway."

"Less move, then, 'cause you nodiss this smoke's gittin' thicker every minit. I don't like it uh heap, I tell you that."

The boy had lived in this country all his life, and I thought he might know more about prairie fires than I did, and besides the smoke was thickening rapidly, and the wind was rising, so that the whole situation did not look encouraging, to say the least.

We hurriedly stowed our camp outfit into the canoes, ate breakfast, and started down the river right toward the fire, and put our muscle on the paddles with such good effect that we were soon at the foot of the "mountain."

Here we ran ashore and climbed up the three or four hundred feet of nearly perpendicular bluff to the top.

We did not need the glass, for all too clearly we could see the red line of flame leaping in the air to the south of us.

The smoke seemed to be going away above our heads, and what we had to contend with seemed more to be that drawn back toward the fire by the eddy in the wind current, which now had apparently changed and was blowing toward the fire.

Five minutes' watching convinced us that we had no time to lose in hunting shelter.

"Say, now, we'd better git to th' gulches on th' north side o' th' mountain, 'cause th' fire won't burn haff as strong down th' hill as it will comin' up on th' south side, 'n' 'sides that, they won't be sech a strong wind to push it. I know uh good place where we c'n pull th' canoes over uh little bar 'n' git into uh purty big, long stretch o' still water in uh crick runnin' in fr'm th' west. 'They's uh high bluff o' rock on th' south side, 'n' th' fire c'n come right to th' top o' th' bluff 'n' not hurt us much. 'They's kind o' short grass 'long there too, 'n' some timber, so it won't burn so fast there anyhow. Liable to be uh lot o' smoke,

though, 'n' we'll haff to look out fer that too. C'mon, less git uh hustle on us."

Down the hill we went, helter-skelter for the canoes, and jumping in, paddled swiftly to the creek the boy spoke of, about an eighth of a mile back up the river.

Landing, we quickly unloaded and carried the canoes over a rifle for about fifty yards, and launched them in the back-water of the creek, where we reloaded them again, and then carefully picked a path through the shallow water until they were safe and snug under the high rock bluff that formed the south bank.

A safer place to escape could hardly be found in the country, and to the boy's quick judgment and intimate knowledge we owe our lives, probably, to-day.

"Say, I'm goin' to th' top o' th' bluff 'n' see how things is," said the boy when we had everything safely fixed, and up he went, climbing the straight sides of the bluff by clinging to the few bushes and points of rock that offered a foothold.

Reaching the top, he stood for a moment

or two looking at the smoke cloud, and then, turning, shouted: "C'mon, up, 'n' fetch th' rope 'n' some matches. It's only juss started down fr'm th' top o' th' mountain, 'n' we c'n backfire, if we hurry up, 'n' fool th' fire sure. Come a-run-nin', cos we hain't got no time to swap jack-knives."

I climbed up the bluff too, then, carrying the coil of half-inch rope—about sixty feet of it—that we used in handling the canoes in rocky riffles sometimes.

The boy took the line and doubled it around a small jack oak that grew on the brink of the bluff, letting both ends hang down. "Now we got uh quick way to git down if we haff to run," he said.

"C'mon, less start uh backfire now," he continued, as he gathered up a great bunch of dry grass and leaves, and twisted them into a torch shape.

"We got to hurry, she's a-comin'!" he said, as he ran toward the coming fire.

A hundred yards from the creek bank he stopped, lighted his torch and ran

parallel with the creek, dragging the burning mass along the top of the grass.

Immediately tiny flames leapt up and began growing, spreading to the north and south.

When his torch was burned out the boy dropped the remains of it and came bounding down toward the creek like a scared rabbit.

"Slide down!" he shouted, and down I went.

A moment afterward he scrambled over the edge of the bluff and slid down the double rope too; then catching one end he pulled the line down and coiled it up.

"Guess it can't bother us now. Yeh see that fire 'at I set 'll burn up to th' top o' th' bluff here 'fore th' big fire gits this far, 'n'en it burns toowords th' big fire too, 'n' when they meet they'll both go out, 'n' there yeh are."

Even as he spoke little wisps of burning grass came tumbling down from above, and we were kept busy watching the canoes and their contents.

In about ten minutes there was nothing but a blackened, smoking stretch of country to the south and the big fire had swept by, "jumping" the creek and going on north like an express train.

We were safe, but pretty well choked with the pungent smoke, and our eyes were red and swollen to a painful degree.

"It's all right now, let's git back to th' river 'n' g'won down," said the boy.

Soon we were afloat and hurrying down to the south with the current.

On both sides there was nothing but the black, smoking world; no life anywhere in sight. The river was more or less covered with charred embers of wood and the debris of the fire too.

On reaching the first little town downstream, we learned that the fire had followed the river for a number of miles, and so concluded to give up our voyage, as there would be no pleasure in floating so far through such a desolate country.

That evening we loaded the canoes in

the baggage car and went back home on the train.

The fire had burned to the river south of town, and there a combination of river, fields and small creeks, coupled with a change of wind, had stopped its rush, and it died a natural death.

BEAVER TRAPPING ON THE RIVER

“SAY, I got uh camp all fixed fer winter up river, 'n' I reckon them beaver pelts is about right now—what yeh say, less go up 'n' git 'em?” Thus the boy spoke as he came into my workshop one bright November morning.

The leaves had become only brown bits of flotsam that the wind played tag with, and piled into long windrows and heaps in the protected spots of ground, and the trees were gray skeletons penciled against the sky. Frost whitened the ground, while every morning there was a fringe of ice along shore in the quiet reaches of the river, and the air was just snappy enough to be like wood wine.

“Well,” I answered, “I guess there is no valid reason why I should not go, so make your plans and consider me a part of the outfit.”

“Aw right. Reckon we might juss as well figger on gittin’ all th’ fun we kin while we’re at it, so I’ll take all my traps along—mebby we kin git some coons ’n’ mussrats while we’re ketchin’ them beaver too.”

“What do I want to take?” I asked.

“Oh, bring yer gun ’n’ shells fer ducks ’n’ geese, ’n’ some small shot fer quail ’n’ cottontails, ’n’en yeh better bring uh couple o’ loads o’ buckshot, cos we might see uh ki-ote—some ’round up there aw right. I got ’nough outfit fer both of us, ’n’ we’ll git supplies fer uh week er so, ’n’en we won’t haff to come back till we git them pelts, ’less we want to.”

“When will we start?”

“In th’ mornin’, I guess—can’t git ready much ’fore that, ’n’en they ain’t no use to hurry anyhow, ’n’ we want th’ best part of uh day to git things fixed ’n’ th’ traps set, yeh know. Say we start early in th’ mornin’?”

“All right, then, I’ll meet you at the landing about sunrise to-morrow.”

“Uh huh. So long.”

The next morning bright and early I hurried to the landing, where a clatter of oars on the sides of the boats and the sound of a merry whistle told me that the boy was already on hand and busy.

“Hullo, got here, did yeh?”

“Yes. I see you are ready.”

“Yep. Got th’ old ‘Mud Hen’ out ‘n’ loaded her up, cos I thought th’ canoes ud be uh leetle touchy like fer so late in th’ season—ice liable to come with th’ first freeze ‘n’ it ud cut ‘em all to pieces, yeh know, ‘n’ en th’ old ‘Mud Hen’ ‘ll stand most any kind o’ knockin’ ‘round ‘thout hurtin’ her any. Git yer stuff in ‘n’ less be goin’. I’ll row ‘n’ you steer, ‘n’ have yer shootin’ iron ready—mighty apt to git some ducks this time o’ day, yeh know.”

Five minutes later we were leaving a long, wrinkly wake that spread across the quiet stream, and tinkled against the thin ice crystals that fringed the shore. The willows now were gaunt stripling trees, outlined like pen lines against the morn-

ing sky, and the blue-gray of the timber banked in behind them half-way to their tops in flattened perspective from our point of view. Small brown birds chirped among the bushes as they hunted their morning meal, but the clatter of summer visitors was lacking, for all the birds were gone, save these hardy little brown fellows, and an occasional slate-colored titmouse that ran up and down the larger tree trunks, unmindful of whether he was on the upper or lower side, or whether he was headed up or down—gravitation seemed to have no more effect on him than it does on thistle down.

“Don’t seem much like it did uh month er so ago ’long th’ river now, does it?” asked the boy. “Still,” he continued, “they’s juss as much to see ’n’ hear as they was then, only it’s different, ’n’ yeh got to know how to look fer it—these here frosty mornin’s changes everything juss like they take th’ leaves offen th’ trees, don’t they?”

The boy kept up a running fire of com-

ment on river life and ways until we reached his winter camp—a snug little half-sod, half-dugout cabin hidden away in a nook of the river bank.

“Here we are,” he announced, as he pushed the nose of the old “Mud Hen” up against the soft bank and jumped out.

“Less git our truck int’ th’ cabin ’n’ git things fixed up fer livin’, ’n’en I want to git them beaver traps set sure to-night, cos the sooner we git ’em th’ better, while they don’t know we’re in th’ country. Yeh see, these here beaver is mighty slick critters, ’n’ they savie things ’fore yeh know it, so th’ best way is to trap ’em ’fore they know yer ’round—that’s why I want ever’ beaver trap I got set fer to-night.”

We piled our outfits into the cabin, then, taking a hasty lunch, loaded the traps and ax into the boat and were soon pulling for the beaver grounds a mile further up stream. On the way we stopped long enough for the boy to cut six

poles, about ten or twelve feet long, and strong enough to hold a struggling beaver when the trap had him fast.

“Now you row ’n’ I’ll fix these trap poles,” said the boy.

I took the oars and the youngster went to work whittling wedges and splitting the small ends of the poles, after which he slipped the ring of a trap chain over the end and drove the wedge firmly into the pole, enlarging it so the ring could by no possibility be pulled off.

“That’s uh trick I learnt from old man Hagey when he was trappin’ ’long th’ river here, an’ it’s the best scheme I ever saw to work on uh beaver trap—— Whoa! Now back up to th’ bank where yeh see that kind o’ uh wore place in th’ grass, ’n’ be careful yeh don’t touch th’ bank er th’ bottom with th’ boat, ’n’en I’ll set this trap fer Mr. Beaver.”

I backed the boat into position, and the boy, taking one of the poles, drove it deeply into the soft mud of the river, tipping it at a slight angle downward, and in

such a position that it was entirely under water when he had finished.

Then he set the powerful trap, and leaning out, placed it in the runway leading into the beaver hole in the bank; but in such a way that the pan was about four inches under water; then he covered the heavy parts of the trap with soft river mud and was finished.

“That one’ll ketch Mr. Beaver by the front foot—left front foot—when he comes out, ’n’en when he finds he’s fast he’ll plunge right fer deep water, takin’ th’ trap with him ’n’ slidin’ th’ ring clear out to th’ end o’ th’ pole. That’s where he’ll make uh mighty big mistake, cos th’ pole’s longer’n’ th’ trap chain is, ’n’ he can’t git back to th’ shore, ’n’en th’ trap is so heavy he can’t swim to th’ top fer more fresh air, ner he can’t git to th’ stick to gnaw it off, ’n’ ’sides it’s hard ’n’ dry, ’n’ he couldn’t cut it anyhow ’ithout breakin’ his teeth. Yeh see them little knots on th’ pole is all long enough to ketch th’ ring ’n’ stop him ef he should

try to git back to shore after he gits caught, 'n' he can't hold his breath long 'nuff to gnaw his laig off 'n' git out that way, 'n' there he is—juss got nuthin' to do but drownd hisself, cos he didn't stop to think 'bout how he'd git back when he struck fer deep water. That's what old man Hagey told me when he showed me how to trap beaver, 'n' he knowed if ever anybody did—'n'en I've caught a lot of 'em that way since, 'n' I know it'll work.

“Some folks puts castor on sticks 'n' things to draw beavers to th' trap, but I think that kind o' stuff is uh whole lot like puttin' anniss oil on fish bait—all uh lot o' rot 'n' foolishness. I reckon it's uh whole lot better to juss figger on bein' smarter 'n whatever you're after is, 'n'en you don't need no such tomfoolery.

“Aw right, less g'won to th' next place—got to set these other five traps to-night.”

By and by all the beaver traps were in position, and we went back to camp, where we soon had things in good shape for a comfortable stay of several days, if need be.

"I'm goin' out 'n' set uh lot o' these mussrat traps now," said the boy. "Yeh git uh bite to eat, 'n' I'll fix these rat traps alone—they ain't pertic'lar work, cos uh rat'll juss purt' near fall into uh trap if yeh give him uh chance."

About dârk he came in, tied up the boat, and said: "I figger we'll have 'bout four er five beaver 'n' twenty er thirty mussrats, 'n' maby uh coon er two, by mornin', less'n it comes uh storm, 'n' that ain't likely. Nothin' moves much when it's a-stormin', yeh know, but when th' weather is like it is now, all these critters goes galavantin' 'round 'bout all night, so we'll have some fur in th' mornin' aw right.

"Less eat. I'm hungrier'n uh ki-ote 't ain't done nothin' but chase hisself fer uh month."

After supper I smoked and listened to the homely wood lore that the boy was so familiar with, until the fireplace glowed dull red and the boy remarked that, "We'd better sleep some."

SNOWED UP IN CAMP

“SAY, I reckon that ain’t more’n haff bad fer one night’s work, huh?” said the boy, as he finished stretching the last muskrat hide over a bent willow stick and hung it in company with a dozen of its kindred, a couple of coon skins and five fine beaver pelts that dangled from the low elm limb in front of the shanty.

“That’s whut I c’nsider uh purty fair night’s work—that is seein’ ’at trappin’ ain’t nuthin’ like it ust to be when old man Hagey trapped up ’n’ down th’ river here—he ust to git fifteen ’r twenty beaver ’n uh night, ’n’ never took no ’count o’ mussrats ’n’ such stuff. Them was trap-pin’ times, but now they’s so many folks cum in ’n’ settled ’long th’ river that trappin’s petered out complete.

“I missed one old beaver up there by that old cottonwood log—guess I set the trap uh little too deep fer him, maybe—

anyways it was sprung 'n' on'y uh few hairs in th' jaws.

"He'll be mighty cute now, 'n' I dunno if I kin git him right away er not. Gee, I'm hungry—bin up since daylight, 'n' I like to froze 'fore I got warm pullin' up to th' traps. This north wind has got uh mighty snowy feel to it, 'n' ducks are thick on th' river this mornin', so I wouldn't be s'prised if we git snowed up here good 'n' plenty 'fore we knowed it. Got plenty o' grub though, so let 'er snow, whut d' we care, huh?"

I had breakfast all ready when the boy finished his hide-stretching operations, and after a dip in the icy current of the river and a scrub with a rough towel the youngster came in to the table, his face aglow with health, and his appetite in keeping with his looks.

"Say, I'll tell yeh whut less do after breakfast—less go 'n' git some ducks 'n' have uh reg'lar barbecue — whut d'ye say?"

"All right, I'm with you. Won't you

have anything more to do with the traps to-day?"

"No, I left 'em all set when I cum down, 'n' I'll go look at 'em juss 'fore dark again, 'n' set them other two er three muskrat traps, 'n'en I guess they'll do the rest."

Breakfast over, we got the guns, and, crossing the river, were soon tramping through the sighing woods in the direction of a string of ponds that the boy knew of.

"We don't want to hunt along th' river, cos th' more racket we make th' more we are li'ble to scare th' beaver I'm after," said the young trapper.

About noon the chill wind that had been moaning among the trees all day lulled itself to comparative quiet, and a few big flakes of snow floated down through the gray branches.

"Less git back to camp. We got ducks nuff, 'n' it's goin' to snow plenty. We better git uh stock o' wood up to camp 'fore it comes, too—hard work, yeh know, huntin' wood when th' snow's got it all

buried up. I don't like th' looks o' this weather uh whole lot, cos I figger uh good, old-time storm's a-comin' sure, 'n' if it does we'll juss haff to hoof it back to town when it clears up, 'n' leave th' boat 'n' outfit tull th' ice gits hard 'nuff to bring 'em back on uh sled."

We were walking back toward the boat as we talked and by mid-afternoon had crossed the river again amid a flying swirl of downy flakes that half hid the fast whitening landscape, and after our guns and game were stowed away inside the cabin, we put in the rest of the afternoon hustling good, dry wood, and building a rough pole and grass shelter over it to keep the snow off.

"Well, I'm goin' 'round to see if th' traps is aw right—goin' 'long?" asked the boy, as the signs of evening came into the sky.

A good deal of scraping and brushing of snow was necessary before we got the old "Mud Hen" in shape for the journey, but in time she slipped out into midstream

and pushed her now icy nose up the current amid a cloud of flying flakes until we reached the beaver grounds.

The river looked strangely black in the new white of the rest of the landscape, and every solid object bore a great burden of snow where the wind did not sweep it off as fast as it fell. Our voices sounded muffled and echoless in the increasing storm, and there was a strange hurrying sound in the air that rushed along above the tree tops.

When the traps were all inspected, the boy cast a quick glance aloft and around the sky and said: "We're goin' to have uh chance to break ice along shore in th' mornin' when we look at these traps, 'n' I wouldn't wonder if to-night's the last of it till it freezes up solid 'nuff to travel on skates—looks that way 't any rate, so we might's well git ready to break camp to-morrow, 'less you want to stay till it freezes up."

An hour later we were snug inside the cabin, with a booming blaze in the dug-out

fireplace, giving a cheerful warmth to the little home in the white wilderness.

"Say, when are we goin' to take that trip west?" said the boy, as he finished hanging his stock of green pelts up over the fireplace so they would dry, and then pitched a huge section of dry limb on the blaze, so it would need no more attention for some time.

"In the spring, I suppose; say when grass gets good—about the last of May or first of June," I answered.

"Where'll we head for? I'd like to go to them Black Hills, up there 'n Wyoming, where you was—that's uh good huntin' country, ain't it—'n' mount'ins 'n' pine timber 'nuff too, I reckon—less go up there."

"All right, that suits me. It isn't so far away as the main chain, and it's as good a game country as there is in the States to-day. Besides, it has this advantage, we can drive all over the country up there with a wagon, which makes it a mighty pleasant place to spend the sum-

mer in. The water isn't anything to brag about, but we don't need to go into the alkali country much if we don't want to; the water in the hills is all right, except in a few places, and I know where they are."

"All right then, that's a go. How'll we go, wagon or pack horses?"

"I think a wagon the better. Take a good broncho team and a light outfit that won't wear the horses out and then travel slowly, and we'll be all right for the summer if we want to stay that long. There is plenty of good mineral in the hills, and we might do a little prospecting, too, if we want to, as we go along. Who knows, we might strike a gold mine before we get back."

"Well, I dunno much about rocks 'n stuff, but I reckon I kin learn, 'n' I'll prospect all right. I reckon I'd know uh chunk o' gold if I see it growin' on uh tree, anyhow; so I'll try it with yeh. What I want more'n anything else, though, is to git uh crack at them deer 'n' elk 'n' bears up there."

"Well, we can get our outfit together this winter and hit the trail as soon as grass is good. The details we can figure on as we go along, and we'll be ready before we know it. What do you say to getting this barbecue of ours going about now?"

"That's so; I'd furgot all about that bunch o' ducks. What'll we do, chuck th' ducks 'n' squirrels 'n' snipes all in together 'n' make a potpie of 'em?"

"I reckon I'm good for half of that kind of a stew if you can handle the rest," I answered.

"Here they go then. You git th' taters 'n' onions 'n' things ready, 'n' I'll yank th' pelts off this bunch o' game while yeh wait, as th' shoemaker sez 'bout half-solin' shoes down 'n town."

The big stew kettle was soon giving forth savory odors, and we hustled around, fixing up a camp supper that was good for hungry outdoor folks, but probably a little rich for dyspeptics to sleep on.

"Gee! we're sure in fer it now, snow's

uh foot deep this minit, 'n' still comin' down like th' ole scratch," said the boy, as he opened the door and squinted out into the night with the air of one who knew the signs.

WE START FOR THE MOUNTAINS

THE day came when the snows were melted and the river ran bank full with a murky flood. The south wind was full of the earthy smell of spring, and robins and bluebirds flitted up out of the sunny lands below the southern horizon. There is something about the awakening of a new summer that makes men restless, so I was not surprised when the boy burst into the workshop like a runaway cyclone, and said, "Say, gee!"

"What's the matter, now?" I asked.

"Less git ready 'n' go t' th' mountains. I'm juss dyin' to git out o' this ole flat country. Gee! I feel 's if I c'd climb forty mile to-day. Whut's th' use o' us foolin' away our time here—less git th' outfit together 'n' git uh hike on us!"

"Now, see here, son," I answered, "you must use a little horse sense and see where

you would come out if you started to-day. You know grass won't be big enough for horse feed for a month yet, and up there your horses have got to have grass, because you cannot carry feed over a thousand miles of wilderness for them. Savvy?"

"Yep. Less git things ready, anyhow, 'n' start juss 's soon 's ever we can. You tinker up th' wagon 'n' I'll git th' campin' part o' th' outfit in shape, 'n'en we'll have the whole thing ready sost t' leave 'bout th' first o' May—whut d' yeh say?"

"Well, that will do. Suppose we use the shop for a headquarters and bring all the outfit here. You can come here and we can talk things over and decide on any point that may happen to be in doubt, so that when we start we won't have to come back for anything."

"That's uh go, then. I'll go 'n' over-haul all th' stuff I got 'n' see what we want to take, 'n' what we don't. I'll fetch 'em in as I come. Goo'by; I'm goin'."

Then came thirty days of suppressed excitement and anticipation for the boy, and at last it was over. One bright May morning we drove down through the town, out across the iron bridge that spanned the river, and slowly up the long slope of hillside where the road climbed to the high "divide."

The boy looked back from the hilltop, and waved his hand in a good-by to the little river where he had lived so many summers and was now leaving to explore other and unknown lands.

Our outfit was a light spring wagon with a canvas cover and a first-class pair of tough little bronchos that would pull, buck, kick or run off with equal vehemence. Packed away in the wagon were all the things that make a camper's heart glad, but there was a conspicuous absence of many useless and cumbersome things that are made for and used by the would-be camper who expects cream in his coffee in the wilderness and kicks if he has to use a saddle for a pillow.

There wasn't much weight in the wagon, but the boy and I made a good many hundred miles with what we did have. This voyaging across the grass land was a joyful experience for both, and the boy found so many new things to ask about and want information on that it kept me busy answering him.

Up along the divide we journeyed until it was time to head northwest, and then we wound down among the cut clay canyons and entered the great wide valley of the Platte.

"Say," said the boy, as he saw this strange river, "this is uh funny kind o' river, ain't it? I've heard about it lots, but I never saw it b'fore, 'n' I reckon I don't think much of it, now't I have seen it. What's th' use o' uh river t' ain't got any trees 'long it 'n' nuthin' but sand bars with uh little water 'round 'em fr'm one bank t' th' other? Hump! Why, uh blamed ole catfish 'd have more sense 'n to live 'n such uh place, seems t' me!"

"That's where you don't know. Now,

let me tell you something about these sand rivers, because you may want to know before we get back. There are plenty of fish in all of them, but you must understand that they stay in the deeper places, where a current swings around a bend and undermines the bank, for instance, or where a log happens to make a 'bore' in the sand by swinging the current into one place and making it wash the sand away. Now, when you know this, you will not have much trouble in catching a mess of catfish in the Platte or either of the Loup rivers, if you use frogs, minnows or grasshoppers for bait, depending on the season of the year, you know."

"I'm goin' to try 'em first chance I git, 'f that's th' case. I'd like to fool some of 'em just fer fun," he answered.

A few days afterward, when we crossed the South Loup, the boy made his promise good, and we feasted on catfish to our hearts' content.

One evening, as the sun went down, it threw a long, low line of hills into blue

relief in the distance, and the boy noticed it.

“What hills are them, ’way off yonder—hain’t th’ mountains, are they?” he asked.

“No; those are the sandhills, and before noon to-morrow we will be driving over this strange country—one that is always moving toward the southeast.”

“Ah, g’won! What yeh givin’ us?” said the boy.

“It is a fact, nevertheless. You see that range of hills is nothing more or less than great heaps of sand, partly grassed over and so dry that the wind always blows the northwest side over the top of the hill and leaves it to sift down on the southeast. You see the edge of the desert country up there, and by noon to-morrow you will have seen the hills move and will know how it is done without any telling. This country stretches from here to the Niobrara River, and after we cross the Dismal River we will follow the Middle Loup right through these sandhills to the other

side, where we will come out at the Pine Ridge country, and that is the last outlying spur of the Black Hills, where they peter out and come down to the level of the grass country. From there the hills get higher and higher, until you get up near Deadwood, then they begin to slope the other way again. You will see all these things as you go along."

"Ain't they any water 'n these sand-hills, only where th' rivers cut through?"

"Yes, they are full of little lakes of the finest kind of water, and in season they are alive with ducks and geese. It's a great game country all through—plenty of deer and antelope and a good many elk, in parts, yet. It used to be a great buffalo country, too, but they are all gone further west or northwest now, and what few are left are pretty wild. It's a Sioux country, too, so we may have a chance to see what a war party looks like before we get back."

"Well, I dunno 's I'm lookin' fer any Injuns to speak of, 'n' I didn't come out

here to do any scrimmagin' 'round 'mongst 'em, but I reckon we kin show 'em some fun if they come round lookin' fer uh fuss."

"There was a jolly smile on the boy's face while he spoke, but there was a glitter in his eye, and a flush of color on his cheek, too, and I knew how well he could shoot, so I concluded it would be pretty unhealthy for a small war party of Indians if they met those repeaters of ours in a fair open fight—the boy would be apt to think he had struck a diversion, and shoot and laugh at the same time—he was built that way, and was a Western boy, who naturally figured on a good Indian being a dead one.

However, no one got our scalps and no war bonnets came within our range of vision on the trip, and the boy found plenty of new and wonderful things to keep him busy asking questions, and me equally busy explaining. It would take too much space to tell you how he thought a soap root was a kind of a palm tree, "er palm

bush, like," as he expressed it, and how a mirage fooled him into looking for a lake one afternoon, how he wondered what horned toads lived on, and was puzzled about what kind of a bird a young curlew was—he "reckoned it might be some kind o' uh ostridge, er somp'n o' that breed, on'y they wasn't no ostridges in th' United States, 't he ever heard of 'ceptin' them 't was brought here fr'm Africky."

He even went out and climbed among the sand dunes the first night we camped on the edge of the sand-hill country, just to satisfy himself what kind of sand they were made of. He was an inquisitive, wide-awake, growing boy, with a thirst for travel and the knowledge it brings with it in these days, and gave no promise of developing into the staid, steady man of to-day, who talks good English, albeit there may be a good Western word crop out now and then when he gets into a thoughtful mood and talks of the days that are gone, when we have watched the golden sun sink into the purple west and

leave the sky a burning wilderness of color
against which our white-tilted wagon
stood in bold relief and our camp smoke
twisted a thin blue spiral.

DOWN IN THE QUICKSAND

“So THAT’S th’ Dismal River, eh?” said the boy, as we drove up to the edge of the sand dunes, where the road pitched its yellow length down toward the stream.

“Less stop here uh minit an’ look at things,” he continued. “Seems ’s if all these rivers out here just kinder got lost like ’n’ go galavantin’ ’round through th’ country ’thout no speshul reason ’tall. They ain’t as nice as uh river with trees all ’long th’ bank, are they? Is ever’ river ’n this country here this same way, juss nothin’ but uh sort o’ ditch like, uh runnin’ crost th’ prairie when they ain’t more sand than they is water?”

“Well, they are a good deal alike,” I answered, “most of them being a ditch as you say, down in a wide level valley like this one, and all of them are full of sand, more or less—quicksand too, by the way, and it is apt to make travel anything but a

dream of pleasure, if you happen to get down in it with the outfit.

“Do you see that little bunch of cabins away up the valley there, on the right bank of the Loup? No, here, away up above the mouth of the Dismal, up this other valley—that’s the middle Loup, and this river right here in ’front is the Dismal.”

The boy looked slowly up the second valley with the glass, and then said: “Uh, huh, I see ’em—sort o’ uh farm, I guess.”

“Well, that is Farmer’s ranch, seven miles from here, and the last ranch but one between us and Pine Ridge. The next is Stem’s ranch, forty miles further up stream and only a littly way from where the Middle Loup rises in Dock Lake, which is just this side of the Mobrara divide. I think we had better cross both rivers and camp at Farmer’s to-night, then go on up to Stem’s to-morrow.”

“What’s the matter with goin’ down below th’ mouth o’ th’ Dismal, ’n’ crossin’

th' Loup down there—won't haff to cross but one river then, 'n' it 'd be easier, seems t' me."

"That's where you lack wisdom, my son, and show that you are a sure tenderfoot in this country. You must remember that the banks of these rivers are straight up and down, and from four to forty or fifty feet high. You can't drive a team up and down such places very easily, can you? Then you must remember that this trail we are following was picked out by the cow-punchers up here as the best route to haul supplies in to camp over, so don't try to hunt a new road—these fellows know the country and you and I don't, see?"

"Yep, 'less g'won 'n' git t' where we're goin' then, cos th' sun ain't any too high to drive seven miles 'n' git into camp decent."

We careened and jolted down the strip of yellow trail, sometimes with a deep gully perilously near one side of the road, sometimes with good traveling under us,

but always with the brake grinding against the wheels and the bronchos bracing back against the stout harness until we rolled out on the level flat and on down to the sandy stream, across it and up the valley of the other until we were opposite Farmer's ranch.

Here it was necessary to ford the Middle Loup, one of the worst quicksand rivers in the West.

"I expect we'll get down in the sand here with the outfit, sure," I remarked; "never crossed this river when I didn't, so we had better get into shape to work quickly if we do."

The boy looked at me with a quick side glance that he had a habit of using, and said: "Humph. That's uh nice layout, I reckon. What yeh goin' to do to buck quicksand anyhow?"

"Well, about the first thing is to be ready to jump overboard right suddenly if the horses go down, and get them loose from the wagon and loose from each other so they can flounder across. The water

isn't very deep, and if a broncho is free to flounder around all he wants to, you won't see him mire down so he can't get out. We'd better get off our shoes and surplus clothing and get the picket ropes and tow line ready for business. Better fasten a picket rope to each horse's neck and bring the coil back into the wagon, because these horses of ours would be pretty hard to get hold of if they got loose in this country."

Everything was soon in readiness for the crossing, and we drove out into the current of the stream. All went well until we were in mid-stream, then the horses struck the quicksand, and after a couple of ineffectual, floundering leaps they were both fast down in the sand, until the water lapped over their backs as they lay mired there in the current.

"Now, out you go, partner," I said. "Get your horse loose from the traces and loose from the other horse. I'll attend to this side. They won't move for a minute or two, but when they begin to throw their heads up, look out, for they'll jump in a

moment more. Get hold of your horse's rope then and let him go to the bank after his own fashion, but stay with him. You must keep moving as you work or you'll go down too."

We were both in the water and working swiftly while I talked, loosening the traces and the snaps that held the neck yoke and lines to the harness.

"Look out now! Your horse is going to get up—get away from him!" I shouted, as I saw signs of movement on the boy's side.

The horse floundered to his feet, went down, plunged up and ahead again, and kept going until he reached the bank, where he stood dripping wet and quiet with the boy safe by his side.

My horse rested a little longer, and then he too got up, only to go down worse than ever, but he was a range horse, and had been through this same experience before, so he kept quiet a few minutes and then began to roll, going entirely under water and over on his other side, where he

jumped to his feet, plunged forward and was down again.

Trying to drive a horse under such circumstances will only result in disaster, but if left to take their own time they will come out all right, so I kept moving about and let the horse work out his own salvation, and in a few minutes he, too, stood panting and wet beside the other on the bank, none the worse for wear.

“Now you take care of the team and I’ll get the neck yoke and double trees, so we can tow the wagon out,” I said to the boy, as I waded back after these two much needed articles that were still in mid-stream on the slowly-sinking wagon.

“Now hitch them up and fasten the two picket lines to the double tree,” I said, as I went back again after a heavy line, which we had brought along for just such scrapes, and I soon had it fast to the doubled picket lines and to the end of the wagon tongue.

“Now when you are ready drive straight back away from the river so you will pull

the wagon across, and I'll stay here to keep the tongue up and steer the ship," I called to the boy as I got back to the wagon again.

"Aw right; ready?" he asked.

"Yes, go ahead."

The wiry little team put a strain on the rope, then got down close to the ground and pulled like majors. The wagon heaved upward out of the sand and then rolled and swayed across the current like a ship at sea, as the wheels sunk into the soft spots in the bottom, and were pulled on out again, and at last the outfit rolled up the bank and came to a stop on the solid ground.

"Say, gee," said the boy, "I'd never 'a' thought o' that way o' gettin' out o' th' sand!"

"That is a trick I saw worked a long time ago, my boy, by an outfit right down on the South Loup. It isn't very elegant, but you notice it works, as all the other little things work out here, where men have to take care of themselves."

“They’s always uh way to do ever’thing most if yeh juss know how, but th’ trick of it is learnin’, ain’t it?” said the boy.

JUST "HITTING THE TRAIL"

"This here's whut yeh call sage brush, is it?" inquired the boy, as he climbed up in the wagon seat with one of the highly scented shrubs in his hand and turned it over and over, inspecting every branch and leaf. "Seems 's 'ough it'd ought to grow bigger'n that if it was goin' to grow 't all, but I reckon they's uh reason why it don't if uh feller juss know'd it."

"Well," I replied, "you notice that this ground is very hard, and that water is pretty scarce—two conditions that have helped to produce this knotty, gnarly little excuse for a tree. I have seen them further west where they grow six or eight feet high in the creek bottoms near water. Take it up in the foothills this side of the main range, where the soil is fairly good and the water is plenty, there you will see it grow to a good-sized bush."

"Hain't much water here 't any time o'

year, I sh'd judge, juss fr'm th' looks o' things, is they?"

"No, not very much. You see, this country is bad lands—that is Pine Ridge off yonder where you can see that chain of hills with the evergreens on. Over here is the South Fork of the Cheyenne River, where it runs around the south edge of the Black Hills, or, rather, between the hills and the bad lands.

"This is a curious country up here, you notice. The line of formation is as clear between the hills and the bad lands as though they were miles apart. Here the water is loaded with alkali—across the Cheyenne River it is good. There is no grass nor rocks here to speak of, and across the river both are plenty. Here it is bad lands; there it is mountains and fairly good soil."

"That's kind o' curious, ain't it? What makes it that way?"

"It is the formation, that is all—just a geological freak. The bad lands are a sedimentary formation and the hills are an

upheaval. The probabilities are that what we see in the present Black Hills country is nothing more nor less than the tops of a half-buried mountain range, and that the country we are traveling over now is the bottom of some ancient lake that——”

“Whoa! gimme th’ shotgun!”

The boy grabbed the gun and tumbled out of the wagon in a reckless way that endangered himself and the whole outfit, but, boylike, landed on his feet and ready for business. Walking back and to one side of the road a few paces, he flushed a pair of pintail grouse, both of which came tumbling down as the gun cracked twice in quick succession.

“What kind o’ prairie chickens d’ yeh call them?” he asked, as he climbed back and inspected his birds. “I never saw no chickens like them down ’long th’ river at home.”

“No, I guess you never did. Those birds are pintail grouse, and the prairie chicken is a different grouse altogether. This one lives up here along the streams,

and only comes up in the high country to nest. You should have left them both alone, as they are probably a pair that are nesting around here some place."

"That's so," said the boy. "Fact is, I never thought nothin' 'bout it when I shot 'em. I juss see uh new kind o' bird 'n' took 'em in. Reckon I'll haff to r'member 'bout sich things after this too—less'n we're short o' meat er somp'n."

All day long we drove over the clay hills and along the sage brush flats, crossing the Cheyenne River without accident in time to go into camp on the north bank, where a little clump of cottonwood trees made us feel as if we had friends near by instead of being just a wandering outfit all alone in the wilderness, and an Indian wilderness at that, for we were not so very many miles from the spot where old Sitting Bull got the long call for the happy hunting grounds in after years.

We would soon be among the Black Hills now, and the boy kept up a rapid

fire of questioning that got me busy finding answers for.

“Say, gee!” he remarked, as he put the kettle on containing the two grouse, with the idea of producing one of his camp stews—made from any kind of game that came handy, seasoned with vegetables and a bit of pork. “Say, I’m juss hankerin’ fer uh crack at uh elk er deer er bear—don’t care much which, but I want to git uh shot at somp’n big. This here ole .45-70 o’ mine ’s juss gittin’ rusty f’r somp’n to do. Here we been out two weeks ’bout ’n’ we hain’t seen nothin’ bigger’n uh kiote, ’ceptin’ them two antelope down ’n th’ sand hills, ’n’ yeh wouldn’t lemme shoot at them.”

“Look here, son, I told you why you shouldn’t shoot antelope, or deer either, for that matter, in the spring, didn’t I? Now here you are getting bloodthirsty again, and you don’t stop to consider that we have plenty to eat, and that big game in the spring is the last thing any white man wants to eat anyhow. Now, you just

keep your ammunition until we run out of grub or some Sioux wants our hair for his own personal decoration; then you may blaze away to your heart's content. Otherwise, don't get foolish and do things that you might regret."

"I guess they's uh heap more sense 'n' they is poetry in that, too," said the boy, good-naturedly. "I ought to know better, 'n' I do know better, too, 'n' to kill things 'n' th' spring, but I reckon uh feller gits sort o' fergetful like, sometimes, 'n' juss wants to kill everything he sees juss cos he can. Course, bears 'n' kiotes don't count, 'n' 'f ever I run 'crost uh bear I'm goin' to shoot 'n' 'keep uh shootin' tull I git him er haff to run."

"You had better give any bear that you meet in this part of the country the right of way unless you've things all your own way," I answered. "They grow pretty big up here, and they have a nasty habit of clawing people all to pieces after you shoot them full of holes. They have a way of living long enough to damage a

man pretty considerably after they are shot through the heart.”

“Well,” said the youngster, reflectively, chewing a straw as he looked into the blaze, “they’s one thing sure; if I see uh bear ’n’ kin git uh good stiddy shot at his ole head I’m goin’ to crack away, ’n’ I bet he won’t feel much like eatin’ me up after one of these ole .45-70’s o’ mine goes through him ’tween his year ’n’ his eye.”

“You had better put it a little further back, for a bear’s brain is mostly behind his ears and pretty low down. Aim low and well back and you have a chance to break his neck and to brain-shoot him, in which case he would probably be through with the troubles of this mundanesphere.”

“Huh! Gittin’ funny, ain’t yeh, on this here bear talk.”

“Oh, no; just giving a rank young tenderfoot a few pointers, that’s all. I think, however, that you will not need many pointers on what to do if you meet one of these bears that run through this country—you’ll be mostly running.”

“Oh, I dunno! Course I ain’t goin’ to take no fool chances with uh big bear; but if one of ’em gives me uh haff uh show I’ll juss everlastin’ly lambaste him full o’ holes er quit shootin’—that’s uh sure thing.”

“Better let him get away if he will, my boy. They’re mighty unhandy to have around the house.”

“We’ll see,” he answered, reluctant to give up, and I thought perhaps he’d better be taken care of while we were up there for fear he would do something he would regret if he met a big bear. However, my fears were groundless, for he was with big Ike Ward when he met his bear, and Ike did all the killing, while the boy stood by and took a big dose of experience that might be called bear cure.

“How long ’ll it be ’fore we git into real mount’ins?” he asked, as he rolled up in his blanket and waited for sleep.

“About to-morrow or next day, I guess—depends on the trail we take. If we go up Skull Creek we ought to camp about

Kara Creek or at the foot of Inyan Kara Mountain day after to-morrow night, I should think."

"Injun Kara? Whut kind o' uh name's that?"

"Sioux. Means a mountain inside of a mountain. Now let's go to sleep. I'm dog tired."

"Aw right."

A NIGHT EXPERIENCE

“So THAT’S Inyun Kara, is it? Well, that looks like uh sure nuff mount’in aw right—on’y it don’t seems ’ough it wuz very big, that is, not fer uh mount’in,” said the boy, as he stood squinting through the purple twilight at the great bulk of Inyan Kara Mountain.

Our camp-fire glimmered with a daylight glare and a thread of blue smoke twisted lazily up toward the crimson and gold clouds, floating so high above us. The canvas tilt of the wagon was tinted with a warm, reflected light, and the horses were munching the grass, which grew all over the flat valley of the boisterous stream.

The boy, arms akimbo and hat thrown back, stood feasting his eyes on the first real mountain sunset that he had ever seen.

“Say, gee! Looks most like you could hit that ole pine up ’n top o’ that cliff with uh rifle ball, don’t it?”

I smiled as I thought of the distance and answered: "If you could shoot three times as far as you can and shoot straight enough, perhaps you could hit that tree—it is about nine miles up to where it stands, you see, and the very best you could do would be to throw a bullet a couple or three miles."

"Course I've read about how this here mount'in air's mighty deceivin', but I didn't have any idee it was that bad. Why uh feller c'n see ever limb 'n ever'-thing up there—it don't seem 's 'ough it was possible it's eight er nine mile up there."

"Well, you can see for yourself to-morrow just how far it is, for I've an idea we will camp up about the mouth of the canyon for a few days and run around afoot. There is a good spring up there, but it only flows a little way and sinks into the ground, the same as all the springs in this part of the world do. Wood is plenty, and there is a nice little glade there with plenty of grass for the

horses, so we can stay as long as we want to.

“The reason I wanted to camp down here to-night was to give you a chance to see the big hill at a distance, and get the general lay of the land, for when you get up there you will find the whole landscape looking very different from what it does now. There are certain big canyons and cliffs which you can get located from here so you will have landmarks to go by, for you can lose yourself very easily up in the rough country, and find that camp isn’t where you thought it was — everything looks so much like everything else, you know.”

“Uh huh, I see. Feller sort o’ wants to figger th’ main points out sost he c’n travel ’thout payin’ much ’tention to th’ rest o’ th’ country, ’s that it?”

“You have the idea exactly.”

The boy studied the rugged features of the silent old mountain until it lost detail and loomed up as a huge blue-black silhouette against the pink glow of the changing

sky, and I suppose he thought the same thoughts that all outdoor people think when they look on the gigantic works of Dame Nature, and find how small men are, compared to them.

When the horses were brought in and the night grew old, we rolled up in our blankets there under the scintillating stars, and the boy had a lot of questions to ask, as usual, before we fell asleep.

"Gee," he said, "don't it seem still up here 'n this country? Nothin' on'y juss that tinkly noise o' water scootin' 'long down there over th' stones 'n th' creek—'n' th' horses juss chompin' 'n' munchin' th' grass like it was sponge cake er somp'n' good like that.

"Hear that coyote howl juss then? Seems 'as 'ough he was forty mile fr'm here, don't it? That kind o' uh soft noise like it comes uh nawful long ways, on'y it's juss 's plain 's 'ough it was clost by, hain't it? Whut's er reason o' that?"

"Well, I suppose its the clearness of the air that makes it such a good conductor

of sound. I have heard men talking in just ordinary tones out here when I could hardly see them. Of course I couldn't hear what they said, but I knew it was men talking. It was plain enough for that. I have heard grouse and other birds calling early in the morning, and they seemed to be right up close too, when in reality they were a long distance away.

"This sound business out here is like the distance—you are apt to have a chance to guess again before you get it just right. I remember once I heard a big landslide come down the side of a mountain in the night——"

"Whoa! whoa! Bill! Steady there, whoa, boy!"

"Here kid, you keep down. Don't jump up and show yourself that way. Keep down in the sage until we know what's up—may be Indians. Got your guns?"

"Yep."

"Keep low then and creep after me."

The horses were alarmed and snorting, and something was wrong in camp.

Silently we crept through the grass and sagebrush clumps of the creek bottom, keeping close to the ground, thus being pretty sure of concealment, and at the same time having the advantage over any man or animal that might be standing up, because they would be more or less against the light of the sky.

Suddenly I spied five gray forms hardly distinguishable from the surrounding brush, in the half-gloom of the night.

"S-s-sh! There they are! Loafer wolves—five of them. You take the one on the left and I'll take the right-hand side. Count three and give it to them," I whispered.

"One, two—crash!"

The rifles cracked with a sharp, spiteful sound, and a moment later the whole valley resounded with a cannonading of echoes mixed with snarling growls of pain and the snorting of the horses—pandemonium seemed to have broken loose in the quiet valley.

"Get the lantern—I'll attend to the

horses," I said, as I groped my uncertain way toward the animals, being still half blinded by the flash of the rifles across the darkness.

In a few moments the boy came running back with the light and the trembling horses soon became quiet again and turned to their feeding as we went out to see what damage we had inflicted on the wolf pack.

First a still, shaggy form came into view, looking strangely white in the lantern light, but done for, as a big, dark patch on the shoulder indicated.

A little to the right was another sitting up on his haunches with forefeet braced wide apart and bloody froth dripping from his fanged jowles.

If ever an animal looked the demon, it was that wolf there in the lamplight. His eyes blazed green and his ears were flat against his head, while the curved lips were raised in an angry snarl above the red jaw and its shining row of white pointed teeth. Bloody froth came from his throat, and

the choking gurgle of a lung-shot beast was his defy to us as he half stood there, unable to fight back, but with the mental inclination to do so very much in evidence. Only a moment the savage picture lasted; then the muscular front legs trembled, his great head sank down, and he settled to the earth; a few rasping gurgles and a few twitches of the great muscles, and he was dead.

Gee! here's another one!" shouted the boy, as he heard a little noise in the sage.

We ran toward this third one, crouching as well as he was able among the sage.

"He's back-shot," said the boy, looking down at the beast.

This one showed none of the anger or fight that marked the one just dead, but seemed rather to want to slink away and avoid us, being shot in such a way that his whole hinder parts were paralyzed.

The boy pulled his six-shooter, and, advancing to within a couple of paces, shot the wolf behind the foreleg and finished his miseries. Then, gathering our tro-

phies, we returned to camp, trailing them along behind us.

‘Funny how that third one got it,’ said the boy. ‘I didn’t see him. Did you?’

‘No, I didn’t, either. He must have been a little further back, in the shadow, and lined up with one of the others, I guess.’

‘Are they dangerous?’ asked the boy.

‘Well, no, not very, generally. Of course, if you happen to be caught out in a deep snow by a hungry bunch of them they would probably make pretty short work of you. They do not run in packs much, though, and are much more apt to be alone or in pairs than in any other way. I don’t quite understand why they should be together here at this time of the year, unless there is a carcass somewhere near. They kill a great deal of stock and some game, and feed on any carcass that they find.

‘They are what the old hunters call the buffalo wolf, because they hung along the flanks of the buffalo herd, waiting to pull

down the calves or the old creatures. The cow men call them loafer wolves, for some unknown reason, probably a corruption of the Spanish 'Lobo,' though, and the 'wolfers' who roam all over this plains country call them loafers, to distinguish them from coyotes and timber wolves.

"Now, let's turn in, and we can take the pelts off in the morning."

UP KARA MOUNTAIN AND DOWN AGAIN

“NOTHIN’ can’t be much nicer ’n that, can it?” asked the boy, as he stood looking up at the mist-hung peak of Inyan Kara Mountain from our new camp in the little glade by the spring.

The first rays of the rising sun were penciling the fleecy clouds with gold and crimson, while the lower bulk of the great hill was still a mass of indigo blue and a blended pile of rocks and timber, reaching up to the sharply delineated crest.

“Say; I reckon ut uh feller livin’ down ’n th’ flat country ’long th’ river doanno what he’s missin’ tull he sees this kind o’ sights, does he? Gee! don’t seem s’ough juss light ’n’ air’d do that, but I reckon that’s all they is to it—’ceptin’ th’ rocks ’n’ timber ’n’ things.

“Looks purtier ’n any picture ’t ever I see—them kind ut fellers ’n’ girls paint

to hang on th' wall, yer know—on'y th' girls mostly allus seems to paint flowers 'stid o' mountains 'n' things; 'at is, things like that. Reckon that hain't th' girls' fault, though, 'cos they mostly stay where they's people 'n' don't come galevantin' round 'mongst th' mountains where th' snakes 'n' bugs 'n' critters is; reckon they'd git th' life 'bout skeart out of 'em ahunerd times uh day if they did; so they natchelly juss haff to paint flowers.

“Course th' flowers ut they paint don't look much like reel flowers, but then th' girls is satisfied, I guess, so what's th' odds?”

“Well, young man, you'd better stop moralizing and get your pack sack on if we are to climb that hill and get back to camp to-day,” I said, as I threw my traveling pack over my shoulders.

“Aw right, I'm with yeh,” he replied, slinging the straps up over his sturdy arms and giving the pack a shake to settle it into position.

“Go ahead, 'n' I'll keep yer moc'sins a-movin'.”

Then we slowly conquered the pitching trail that led ever upward over steep slopes covered with smooth pine needles, where a misstep would have sent us crashing down into the gulch—on up over great masses of tumbled rocks that had ridden some snow-slide half way down the mountain in former days, and over all the little narrow ledges, where we must needs face the cliff and cling with our finger tips and moccasined toes and not look down into the dim gulch, with its mass of seemingly needle-pointed pines, reaching upward, so far below.

Past the sunny, moss-covered rocks, where the yellow violets grew in the crevices and the quaint, waxy mountain flowers sidle up against the boulders for protection from the winds that forever moan across the high places of the earth.

Then at last we came to the great cliff where the south side of the big mountain is broken sheer off and is only a

smooth wall of rock four thousand feet high.

Flat down on our stomachs, with the packs and guns left behind, we crept right to the edge and enjoyed the prospect that flattened away below like a play world in a sand heap.

"Gee!" said the boy; "this makes uh feller feel creepy 'n' sort o' funny all over, like he's goin' to juss tumble head-fo'most away down there ont' them rocks 'n' trees 'n' things, don't it? Looky there! There's uh big bird, uh neagle, ain't it, sailin' 'long, 'way down there, 'bout half way to th' ground! Gee! don't it look funny to see uh bird a-flyin' 'long 'n' us a-lookin' at his back 'stid o' his breas'? That's th' first time I ever see anything like that."

"Lay still," I answered, "I'm going to roll a big rock or two over the cliff—you watch them and see what happens when they strike the ground."

Then I scrambled back up and started a big boulder to rolling out and over the cliff edge—then another.

Both slipped over the edge and no sound came back as they plunged downward into space.

"Gee! they're a long time fallin'," said the youngster.

"There's th' first one—'n' there's th' other! Gee! They're knockin' trees down like pipestems—juss jumpin' 'n' rollin' like er couple o' cannon balls! Gee! but they're smashin'—there! one of 'em's busted all to smash agin' 'nother big rock 'n' they's uh sort o' smoky lookin' place, 'n th' air like ye'd fired uh gun."

All this was a strange, new experience for the boy, and I smiled as I thought how I had long ago enjoyed the same "creepy" feeling that the boy described and watched big rocks crash down among the pines in the Uintah range, far beyond the Western horizon from our present perch on Kara's side.

"Come on, lad," I said: "we can't lose much time if we make the peak and back to camp before night. The trail from here on is smooth and easy, but it is long,

so if you want to look at the rest of the world to-day we must be going."

Presently we were traveling the "hog-back," where the trail was all the flat ground there was, and on both sides the mountain fell, steep and tree-covered, away to the lower world.

Above us were the junipers clinging downward from the great mass of creviced rocks that formed the peak.

The boy had a volume of comment and questions for me to listen to as we pulled ourselves up over these last obstructions and then stood on the top of the world, panting for breath but safe and glad that we were there.

When our pulses were normal and we breathed naturally again, the boy began:

"What's that sort o' uh cloud 'way off over there?"

"Mountains. Probably some of the main chain of the Rockies; perhaps one of the high peaks in northern Colorado. This range over here to the northwest is the Big Horn chain away

west of Powder River, where Custer was killed.

“That queer pile to the north there is Devil’s Tower, just a strange freak of nature that has forced that pile of basalt up into the air and left it. Inyan Kara is formed of the same kind of rock. This little mountain all alone here to the north is Sundance Mountain, where the Sioux Indians hold their sun dances. These to the east and northeast are the Black Hills, each little chain having a name of its own. The nearest range is called Black Buttes; that’s the Bearlodge Range just north of Sundance and that one away off to the east, the one that only shows its top, is Custer’s Peak.”

“Gee, but they’s lots of ’em, ain’t they?” said the boy. “Say, I’m hungry, less eat.”

His last remark brought a hearty laugh from me, and the old mountain top rung with more hilarity perhaps than had broken the silence of the upper regions of the world for many days. It struck me as a laughable thing when the boy abruptly

mixed the grandeur of the view with the very material and commonplace idea of hunger. At any rate the lunch was produced and the youngster did ample justice to the cold venison and hard biscuits that we had carried all the way up in our pack sacks.

"Gee, I'm thirsty 's uh fish," was his next remark. "Where'll uh feller git uh drink?"

"Well, I guess we are a good way above the nearest running water. You didn't think that you'd go so high that there'd be no place for the water to run down from, did you, when you left camp?"

The boy looked blank.

"I never thought o' that," he said.

"No, I know you didn't; what are you going to do about it?"

"Go 'ithout, I reckon," he answered.

"Well, you see you won't have to this time, my boy, because a good fairy told me there was no water up here, and I just put a canteen full into my pack for fear we might need it."

"Gee, but that's good fer sure," he answered with a grin, as he passed the canteen back after he had absorbed one-third of its contents.

"Now," I said, "let me tell you a few things that may be useful to you some time. Always remember that the peak of a mountain, unless it is a snow mountain or unless it is early in the season, is just about the driest place you can find on the face of the earth, and don't go up for any length of time unless you carry at least some water with you. Next, never drink very much at once up here, because it makes you unsteady on your feet if you climb in any of the bad places you are more than apt to find along the trail. Don't eat much, for the same reason. You can get along very well on a mouthful or two of water at once, and just enough to eat to keep from feeling hungry is far better than a full meal in this high country. Then, you can travel better, are steadier and surer footed. Wait until you get lower down to eat or

drink much and you will get along all right."

"Reckon I won't forget that—not after this here lesson sure," said the boy. He was a regular sponge when it came to just simply soaking up lore of the wilderness, and I knew would need no second prompting.

"You see where the sun is, don't you?" I asked, after we had sojourned for some time in the upper country. "We had better be going if we are to get back to camp. This is not a pleasant place to be after the sun gets down, for it gets pretty cold and does it very quickly, so let's go.

"Here—not that way—we'll go down the cliff. That is why I brought the ropes. Give me yours and we will knot them together in the loop ends, then we can double them around a tree trunk or pointed rock and slide down some pretty steep ground with safety."

The boy looked on while I explained this method of mountain travel, and then we started down the almost straight northern

side of the great hill, rather than to take the time to retrace our steps over the long trail that wound up from below, following the great ridge of rock, which twists half-way around the peak just like the thread of a screw and gives the mountain its name.

“Roping” is a fast way of traveling down hill, and in an hour we had slid, clinging like flies, from the peak downward until we stood among the nervous, quaking aspen trees that grew in the bowl-like head of a little canyon. Down this cleft we traveled easily, and came out into the little glade where the grass grew and our transient home had been left early in the morning.

“Gee, it don’t look like it was uh day’s travel to go up there ’n back, does it?” asked the boy, as he watched the blinking stars come out one by one and hang glittering in the blue-black dome above old Inyan Kara, the pile that had been named by the Sioux in the name of “a mountain within a mountain.”

ACROSS THE DESERT COUNTRY

INYAN KARA seemed just as near as it had been when the boy watched the sun gleam first on its top early in the morning, away down by the spring where we camped at the foot of the pine ridge.

The only difference was that the deep blue seemed to have faded out of the side of the old mountain and left it a lighter, smoky, indistinct bulk that was a little lower down on the horizon.

“Seems ’sough that hill don’t git much further off no matter how much we travel,” said the youngster. “Here we bin goin’ uh day ’n’ uh haff, ’n’ there’s th’ ole mountain juss like’t was when we started, on’y yeh can’t see none o’ th’ holers on th’ side of ut like yeh kin when yer clost up—’n’en it don’t set s’ high’s ut did. Reckon that’s cos we’re gittin’ kind o’ over th’ bend o’ th’

world like, 'n' yeh can't see 'round th' curve."

"You guessed the reason exactly," I answered. "By and by you will only see the top of it and that will look like a bit of cloud right on the horizon, and then when the sun sets you will see all the colors of the rainbow reflected from those old rocks where we ate our lunch the other day."

"Th' Bearlodge Range ain't th' same color 's Kara is. What's 'er reason o' that?" asked the boy.

"They are timbered clear to the tops, and are not as high as Kara. Timber always looks more or less blue in the distance—sometimes even indigo blue when the light is right. There is no reflected light, just the blue always, sometimes one shade, sometimes another, but always blue. Remember that in this part of the world, too, for it may be valuable when the cold northwest winds come down over this country and you need wood for a camp."

"Aw right; I won't furgit."

We are driving across the desolate country between the Black Hills and the Big Horn Range—a country that is baked and dry at all seasons except just while the winter snows are melting, and even then there is no water except a pool here and there in the dry bed of a long-ago creek.

Just now the weather was very warm for early summer, and the gray ground reflected the heat until the air was aquiver with it. A few stray flowers still struggled to bloom against the drouth, but they were stunted and undersized, and their colors lacked the brilliant hues of their kind that had come and gone with the meager moisture of the melted snow banks. Here and there the purple lake petals of the pincushion cactus made a spot of color in this gray desert—a few gaudy prickly pear flowers perched with half-closed leaves on the upper rim of one of the green pads, in close company with a tiny striped lizard, perhaps, for these little creatures basked in the sunlight or flitted

across the barren, hot ground as the mood seized them. Mostly it was gray desert covered with grayer sage brush in the valleys and low places, and with rocks of a hundred hues to crest the hills or pile in picturesque abandon downward into the valleys.

“What’s that? Looks like uh town er sompin’ way off there?” said the boy.

“Bad Lands. What you see here is the south edge of them, and it is a wrecked country from there clear up to the Missouri River, a good many miles to the north. That country is worse than this, for it is loaded with alkali, and has not even sage brush or grass to cover its nakedness. It is the bottom of an ancient lake, cut and gashed by erosion until it is now nothing but a country of a thousand hills, each hill with a flat top and built up of many-colored strata. There are no good springs there—all are thick with alkali. There is fire clay, coal, ashes, clay, sandstone, fossil monsters and petrified things up there till you want no more. It is a

country of ruin, silence and death, my boy, and have a care that you do not stray far among those flat-topped buttes, for each one looks like each other one until you are puzzled and lose your way, then—well, there are many bones in there, and yours would not be noticed by a passer-by.”

“Gee! that must be a’ nawfull sort o’ uh place ’f that’s th’ case, but I’d like to get up clost ’n’ have uh look at ’em anyway,” said the youngster.

“We will cross a spur of that country soon, and you will get all you want of it then.”

“Whoa! Wait uh minit—they’s uh whopper of uh rattlesnake right b’hind that rock, all curled up ’n th’ sun. I want his skin.” The boy had tumbled out of the seat and was running back on the trail as he spoke.

In a moment more he had picked up a fragment of a rock and battered the life out of a six-foot “diamond back” rattlesnake. Then he pulled out his pocket-

knife, put his foot on the snake's neck and after cutting the skin clear around the reptile's neck he skinned the squirming body despite the muscular contortions and the singing rattles.

"Ain't it uh daisy?" he asked, as he came complacently back with the yellow-marked pelt dangling across his arm. "Goin' t' make uh hat band o' that feller's jacket—one, two, five, nine, eighteen rattles—good string, ain't it? Well, ole feller, you won't never bite anybody else, that's one sure thing, an' yer hide'll do me juss 's much good er more 'n' it would do you, anyhow, cos you'd uh shedded it anyway, 'n' 'sides, uh feller 'd ought to kill uh rattlesnake ever'time he sees one, juss same's he would uh kiote er any other varmint ut's dang'rus 'n' no good."

He certainly had the Western idea about rattlesnakes, for no man who has dwelled in the grassland or ridden the range will pass by one of these dangerous snakes—cow men especially will always stop and kill them on sight, using the "hondu" or the

swivel end of their picket line for the purpose, or even just a loop of rope.

All through the hot afternoon we drove on across the gray desert, passing by the horned toads, the lizards and the cactus, until we were near the Belle Fourche River, in time for the night's camp.

"What's that white stuff over there; 'tain't alkili, is it? Seems too kind o' yellow," said the boy.

"Soap, natural soap," I answered. "That is something of a curiosity even in this country of strange things. It is actual soap, too, all right, and it is really a spring of soft soap coming out of the ground. You see the whole country here is loaded with alkali—to the west there is coal. Bed rock slopes toward the Black Hills, and in the lower country here along Wild Horse Creek and the Willow there are some oil springs, where crude petroleum comes up out of the ground. In some instances the alkali and oil meet in about the right proportion, and you have one of these 'soap beds,' as the cattle men

call them. They are dry on top, but soft under the crust, and cattle that try to cross them break through and sink into the mass of soap underneath and never get out. That is the reason the cattlemen have begun to fence these treacherous places. You see they look like dried-up springs, and the cattle come to them in the hot weather looking for water, and down they go. Nobody knows how deep they are, but you can push a good many ten-foot poles down, one on top of the other, and when you are tired out some other fellow can push just as many more down on top of them."

"Gee, I don't want much to do with that kind o' uh mess. Do they all look sort o' white 'n' crumbly on top like this one?"

"Mostly; some are more so, some are less, but the character is the same. Keep away from the edge of them even, if you expect to be safe."

"Won't ketch me foolin' round no sich uh trap 's that is, you bet," said the boy.

“Hol’ on, gimmeth’ gun—saw uh kiote juss sneak over that point down there—’m goin’ after him.” Away he raced up to the top of the next ridge like an Indian, and stood among the rocks waiting. The coyote, with characteristic cunning, had vanished, and the lad could not get a shot.

Coming back, he stopped every few feet and picked up something from the ground, so that when he arrived at the wagon once more he was loaded down with a hatful of rocks.

“Got some pet-ree-fide wood, ’n’ things, anyhow,” he remarked, as he climbed back on the seat.

In his collection there were fossil shells, petrified eels, wood, bone and other substances, turned to stone, and there were also some fine moss agates and carnelians, all gathered within a few yards of space, and there were tons of them left littering the ground for a long distance.

These things kept him interested while I drove down the long slope of hillside to the valley of the Belle Fouche and brought

the outfit to a stop on the banks, where a bit of open glade stretched along among the switch willow brakes, and a few cotton-wood trees offered dead wood for our camp-fire.

There was a pool there in the river I knew, and it was all the water we could get, though it was red with alkali, and the rim of the pond-like place was white with a frost-work of crystals all around it. Yet it was this or nothing. Ere the sun vanished our camp was made, the horses picketed and our fire going merrily. The coffee pot bubbled and hissed and the alkali water foamed inside, but we made good coffee just the same, because we put a few crystals of acetic acid in with the coffee to kill the alkali.

LORE OF THE TRAIL

“SAY, is all this country juss desert like it is here?” asked the boy, as he helped himself to his second cup of black coffee the next morning.

“Pretty much the same from here clear over to the Big Horn Mountains, then it changes to rough, mountain country, with plenty of good water, grass and timber in spots, until you get across into Idaho, then it is lava and sand and sage brush, and a little grass mixed in until the Cascade country begins, just across the Columbia River. Over on the Pacific side of that range it is hills and timber clear to the ocean.”

“Gee! That’s where I’d like to go! Seems s’ough this old desert is too much alike—all cactus ’n’ horn toads ’n’ things ’tull uh feller gits plumb tired of ’em. ’N’en th’ water up here’s purt-near worsen whisky—guess that’s why s’ many fellers

drinks whisky here too. Ain't no fishin', I reckon, in uh thousan' mile o' country like this nuther. What's suh use o' such country, anyhow?"

"Don't you see the cattle all around you? That's use, isn't it? The beef for half the country comes from these very hills, my boy, in spite of all this desert and desolation. There are men who live out their lives among these buttes and coulees, and fight the desert, the Indians, the varmints, water, rattlesnakes, heat and all—just to see that you have beef and plenty of it down in the States.

"There are thousands of wild things up here too; deer, antelope, bear, wolves and a host more that furnish meat, pelts or sport too——."

"We hain't seen but mighty few of 'em. Where do they range anyhow? Seem's like we'd dought to seen somp'n moren kiotes in all the country we've been travelin', if they're so plenty."

"Well, in the first place, we are not hunting, for the season is not right, and

in the next place, we have been following the trail. These wild things keep back in the hills and don't cross as plain a trail as we have been following unless they shift their feeding places. Do you see that blue line of hills off to the west there? That is the divide between this river and the Powder, and it is a rough bit of country too—full of gulches and cedar patches, and with some pretty good springs scattered here and there through it, and it is a game country. Now, I'll tell you what I don't mind doing. We can drive up to Ward's ranch and visit Ike and Phil this evening, and then if they happen to be out of meat we can all go hunting up Mount Zahn way to-morrow, and get a blacktail buck for a change of grub. Mind you, no does, and not more than one buck, even if we see a dozen. Anything else besides deer and antelope you can call game unless we run into a bunch of elk or a stray buffalo or sheep—these we will let go, even if we get no deer—understand?"

"Uh-huh, I savie. Think we kin git

uh deer, do yeh? Gee, but I'd like to git uh crack at a nold buck with uh set o' horns like uh plum thicket! Wouldn't I, though?"

"Well, you can have the chance, for I think I can just about put my finger on several unless the Indians have been raiding down through here or something else happened to drive the deer out. I know their runways up there all over that country, and I can find a buck without much trouble, I guess.

"Now, let's hook up and get to Ward's, for the sun is getting up, and it is a big twenty miles from here to that line of hills and Ward's cabin is in the flat just this side of the hills."

Soon our outfit wended its crooked way across the desolate landscape that basked in the first rays of the early sun.

It was still cool and delightful and the boy was all animation and chatter as we went along, following the gray thread of a trail that wandered up and down, twisting back against the bluffs to cross some little

canyon, then curving back toward Donkey Creek again as though it was afraid to lose sight of that miserable little excuse for a water-course.

There is always a companionship some way about a stream and a trail, and they keep close company wherever they can in the wilderness, be it desert, woods or mountains.

"What's all them rocks 'n uh circle that way for?" suddenly asked the youngster, as he noted them beside the trail.

"Teepee rings," I answered. "What you see there is a sign, a record, of a past camp, where some Indians have pitched their teepee—probably for a few days, while hunting or just traveling. The rocks were piled around the lower edge of the teepee skins—the tent walls, you know—and when the teepee was taken down the rocks were simply rolled off the edge of the skins, so they remained in a circle, just as the squaws left them when they folded up their house and vanished. See, there are more of them over there,

too—there has been a hunting party here in all probability, but it was a year or over ago, for you see the grass has grown up against the rocks and browned there, and there is new grass growing around them again.”

“That’s th’ way they do up here, huh? Don’t use no tent pins—juss roll rocks onto th’ bottom o’ th’ tent ’n’ hole it down that way? Well, that ain’t uh bad idee nuther, ’n’ uh feller will find out things as he goes along, won’t he?

“What’s them white spots ’way over ’n’ that flat crost th’ creek?”

“Antelope. Take the glass and count them.”

“Gee, they’s uh whole bunch of ’em, ’bout forty er fifty, I reckon—’n’ they’s uh lot more ’way on up—’n’ more on th’ side o’ th’ hill! Gee! They’s uh whole herd of ’em! Lot o’ big bucks ’mongst ’em, too—I kin see their horns—little black shiny ones ’at curl back ’n’ end in uh kind o’ a hook, ’n’en they’s a little prong, looks like, juss above ’ur eye.

Gee, they are purty, ain't they? Less git one o' them bucks."

"Do you want to shoot one of them or wait for a black-tail buck in the morning?"

The boy looked through the glass again; then heaved a big sigh. "Guess I'd druther wait—but they's a mighty big buck in that bunch," he said.

A few moments later we drove in between the hills and lost sight of the bunch of antelope, so the boy had to hunt something else to interest him.

He asked about the big slag boulders that littered the country, and had to hear the whole geology of the edge of the bad lands before he was satisfied; then it was points on the poison of the centipede that interested him; then prairie dogs came into the conversation, and he freely expressed his contempt for the theory that they did without water and lived pleasantly in company with owls and rattlesnakes.

"Ain't I killed more'n one ole rattler with uh belly full o' young prairie dogs? You bet, I have, 'n' nobody wants to tell

me 'at dogs lives right 'long 'n th' same holes 'ith snakes—I know better. 'Th' rattler ain't doin' nothin' but huntin' pups when he calls on uh fambly o' dogs, 'n'en when he's et up all he kin swaller comf'table he crawls out 'n th' sun 'n' goes tu sleep fer true, 'n'en's when I git him."

While he was dilating on the subject of prairie dogs we drove out from the hills and began to cross the last flat before reaching Ward's place, and by two o'clock we had hailed those worthy brothers and introduced each other there on the hot desert.

Our team was soon taken care of, and we enjoyed our first meal that was cooked over a stove for many days when we sat down in the rough cabin so far from people and things.

After dinner our pipes were lit and we sprawled at length across some buffalo robes flung on the ground where the shadow fell north of the cabin, and there we talked the lore of the desert and

planned to kill a big buck on the morrow, for we were a healthy company, with a longing for the juicy steaks of venison.

“Reckon we’d best go too-woard th’ red buttes north o’ hyer airly ’n th’ mornin’, C’manch,” said big Ike Ward, as he looked up into the sky from his point of vantage on the flat of his back across the big buffalo robe.

The blue smoke wound upward from his black pipe, his long hair curled about his square features, and one leg rocked up and down across the other bent knee as Ike unfolded the plan for to-morrow, a plan that meant the ending of the days for one big buck, for Ike was a man who took one, or not more than two cartridges when he went after deer, and he always got meat, too.

I’ve seen him shoot, and it is a nice bit of action—just as cool and easy as though his target was as big as a house and standing still, instead of a blue buck no bigger than your hand, bouncing across a rough hillside five hundred yards away—just

bouncing like a blue rubber ball for a few moments, then when the gun spat it lead and the dust flew against the hillside, the buck fell headlong, and did not rise. Then Ike would wipe the smoke out of the barrel and take a fresh nip of tobacco and go to the buck. That was the man who outlined the way that the buck was to die to-morrow.

“Ef we don’t ketch one clost to th’ spring, we’ll hunt into them cedar canyons where th’ lion like to fetched Phil th’ time he got th’ bull elk up there; reckon we cain’t miss a-gittin’ one in thar shore —’n’ git back ’fore it gits hot, too.”

And so it was planned.

“How was it about Phil and the lion, Ike?” I asked.

“Ast Phil,” chuckled big Ike. But that is another story.

A TRIP WITH THE WARD BOYS

THERE was a new, clean smell in the air when we left Ward's cabin under the snappy stars, and there was that peculiar stillness which comes into the night just before the gray of dawn. So it was a silent cavalcade of dim forms, conversing but little, and that little in very low tones, as we rode toward the dim, dark bulk across the northern sky which I knew to be the red buttes where the Bad Lands came down and ended against the plain.

In due time we reached a spot where a few scraggly cedars grew, and tied our horses there, going on afoot to the hillside above the spring, where Ward thought we should get a deer without much trouble, when they came down to drink about daylight. Objects were still only dim blots in the general scheme of darkness when we four settled down among the rocks and

began our watch that was to end in killing a big buck.

If any one spoke now it was in a whisper and the comfort of a pipe was out of the question, for game can scent tobacco smoke a good bit further than they can the men who make it.

Ike had picked a special point of vantage for the boy, and had taken him under his special care, to be initiated into the mysteries of big game shooting, while Phil and I sat among the boulders a short distance away, talking of old times.

This was too difficult to continue in a whispering conversation of any great length, so we soon became mere motionless, but watchful, bits of the landscape, and remained as such until a cheeping call such as a young grouse makes turned our eyes toward big Ike.

A pantomime followed, in which Ike told us by signs that three deer were advancing toward the spring below us, though objects were hardly yet more than patches of darkness in the gray dawn,

which had now snuffed out all but the morning star. Phil and I soon had the deer located as they moved against a patch of quaking asp, and then saw a little later that there was a very small buck and two does in company. Again Ike chirped, and again there was a pantomime, which said, "Let them go; we will get a bigger buck for the kid." Slowly the deer loitered along, nipping at the fresh herbage, looking, listening, always alert, and slowly advancing toward the spring, and before the sun was up they had dipped their pretty noses into the clear water, while the four of us watched them at a distance of twenty yards. They had finished drinking when two more, a doe and a fawn, trotted up, took a late drink and then the whole five moved down into the canyons and were gone when the sun shot his first yellow ray across the world and tipped Mount Zahn with gold.

Then Ike unfolded his big frame and straightened up behind the rocks. "Come on, Kid; ain't no use monkeyin' 'round

hyer no longer; deer don't drink arfter sunup, an' we'll hafto hunt th' gulches fer yer buck now," he said.

"Which way, Ike?" asked Phil.

"Reckon them breaks where yer lion like tu got yeh d'ought tu pan out—which way's th' wind?—alright, guess we'd better git in yunder," he said, as he wet one finger and held it up to "feel the wind," an old trick of the wilderness, by the way, and one that always shows the true wind direction, because the windward side of the wet finger "gets cold quickest." Leaving the spring, we started to travel afoot in a very wide circle that would cut a lot of very rough country, and end at the horses, Ike and the boy traveling together and Phil and I spreading out so we could cover a good bit of ground thoroughly.

A mile had been reeled off when I heard the grouse call again, and Phil beckoned me to come. Together we advanced toward Ike, being guided by a pantomime from him as he crouched behind a big boulder where we soon arrived.

“Nine of ’em ’n a bunch; Kid see ’em fust, ’n’ they’s a whalin’ big buck in amongst ’em. Juss gone int’ thet patch o’ cedars crost th’ canyon, ’n’ I reckon they’re headin’ fer th’ no’th side o’ th’ hill tu bed down,” Ike explained.

“Reckon we’d better cut ’round this side ’n’ head ’em ’bout on th’ ridge, hadn’t we?” queried Phil.

“Juss what I cal’lated. Kid’d ought tu git a good open shot thar, ’n’ he kaint miss handy, fur he’ll have good runnin’ shots if they break. Less move, fur they ain’t travelin’ slow.”

A minute later we were moving around and up the hill at a slow trot, and soon had brought the ridge into view, but the deer were not in sight.

“See ’f yeh kin locate ’em, Phil,” said Ike, as he crouched with the boy and me behind the boulders.

Phil left his gun and crawled out along the side hill, carefully scanning the hill-side as it came into view below the ridge.

Suddenly he reversed his movement and

came rapidly back to us. "Comin' right here 't th' fut o' th' hill—big buck fust, 'n' not forty yards away. Git ready, Kid, yeh got a shore shot this time 'n' he's a whopper, too," he said.

The boy poked his brown rifle barrel forward over the rocks, scraping it slightly as he did so, and just then the big buck came to the top of the ridge and stopped stock still, looking toward the morning sun and flapping his big ears forward.

"Stidy, kid," hissed Ike in his ear; "don't yeh pull trigger now tull yeh know yeh got him, fur yeh won't git 'nother shot at 'nother buck like thet 'f yeh live tu be a hundred year old. Take yer time—haff way up his shoul'er 'n' when yeh know it covers him, cut 'er loose, but—" Bang! The rest of Ike's instructions were lost in the roar of the gun. The big buck doubled up like a jackknife, and then bounded, or rather plunged, away down the hill with the whole bunch at his heels and all with their "flags flying," except the big buck, who

ran low, with heavy, plunging leaps and outstretched neck.

Instantly the boy leveled his rifle and the lead began to stream after the buck, while Ike had his gun with the sights in line with the fleeing deer as a safety measure.

"Stidy, kid," said Phil; "yeh got him hard hit, 'n' he kaint git fur—no use o' schutin' up th' meat."

But the boy's blood was up, and the rifle barked and spat, and the dust clouds rose about the buck where the bullets struck, until, just when another leap would have hid him among the cedars, he plunged down in a heap and rolled against a boulder—still.

The two other deer just behind him cleared both his prostrate form and the big rock at a single bound and crashed away among the blue growth of stunted trees which waved as a farewell as they disappeared.

Then the boy broke loose and yelled like a young Indian on his first warpath, and

the way he bounded down that rocky steep would have done credit to the big blue buck himself.

Ike and Phil grinned and looked at me.

"Kinder gits rattled sum when it's all over, don't he?" said Ike.

"Mighty stidy headed kid while th' fun's goin' on," said Phil. "I'se watchin' his gun, too—wan't a sign o' shake er fever f'm th' time he fust poked it acrost th' rock tull th' buck went down, though he shot mighty fast."

"Only the way he always shoots," I answered. "I've seen him kill half a dozen young prairie chickens in about as many seconds with a light rifle, while they crossed a road, and it was about dusk, too."

We were proceeding slowly down toward the boy and the buck as we spoke, and in a moment the youngster began:

"Gee! Hain't he uh daisy! Ain't that uh head fur yeh! Reckon I didn't fix him plenty er nothin'—five shots, 'n' three of 'em clean thro' him, 'n' 'nother'n juss ketched th' side o' his year 'n' took uh

chip out—kaint find th' other'n 'tall; must uh missed, I reckon. I want to keep thet head, C'manch', 'n' take it back tu th' States—one, two—nine prongs. Gee, he must be uh nold feller!"

"Well, Kid, git yer knife out," said Ike; "yeh might's well learn tu take keer o' yer game now 's ary other time, so take holt—it's gittin' warm a'ready, 'n' we'd better be gittin' too-woards home."

"I'll git th' hosses up," said Phil as he started off.

Under Ike's directions the boy proved himself a good butcher, and soon had the quarters unjointed and the body skinned out of the deer, and yet had not skinned the quarters and legs out of the hide at all.

"Pack 'em a heap easier thet a way," said Ike. "Say, kid, ain't thet a purty big hole thar fer one ball to make—lemme see it a minnit—. Yessir, blamed ef he didn't put two bullets int' almost th' same place—see, one of 'em juss cut a piece out 'n'en follered right in th' same place where th' other 'n' went. Kid,

yeh couldn't do it ag'in 'n a thousand year—barrin' acksdunts."

When Phil came up with the horses, we packed the deer on one, tied the head on a second, and the tenderloins were rolled in a "slicker" and lashed on behind the saddle of the third. Then we started back for the ranch, Ike and Phil telling of other hunts when deer had not been killed, with so little trouble; of times when a buck must die or a man must starve, and only a cartridge or two to go on; times when the Sioux got restless and hunted the hunter, while he must needs hunt and dodge together. They were interesting men, those two sturdy plainsmen who lived where the Bad Lands came to the edge of the plains, and who had fought the country, the storms, the Indians and all, and were still alive and as tough as pine knots when we came down the hill in the warming day.

"You see the feather a-hangin' over the bear skull down't the house, didn't ye, Comanch?" said Phil. "Wull, right up

ag'in thet boulder over yunder 's where ole Joe Lay Flee bored th' Sioux ut wored ut—long 'n seventy-four er five—'n' I juss sauntered up yere 'n got th' big feather outen his war bonnut arfterwards—thet is arfter we'd burried Joe—pore cuss, they had shot him full o' arrers, 'n' he pegged out 'n a cupple o' days arfter he got yere; but he got seven ut he knowed of, he tole us—thet's his grave over yon, wher' th' pile o' rocks is. Ike 'n' me planted him thar. Good feller, Joe war, too."

"What's uh matter, Kid? Yeh ain't sayin' nuthin'," said Ike.

"I'm inderested," answered the youngster, as he glanced back at the horse that carried the big buck's head and watched it swing from side to side and up and down under the movement imparted by the swinging gait of the cow horse. "Gee, won't they look aw right down 'n th' States!" he said, as we pulled up in the shade of the house and began to unpack.

OUR HOME - COMING

THE summer days were changing to autumn and here and there a bit of brown had encroached upon the greenery when the boy and I pulled up in town "down in the States" again, after our long trip into the desert. We were browner and probably a bit healthier than when we started, for the dry, pure air of the desert country is a balm for the outdoor man, and we had breathed our fill.

From Ward's ranch all the way home we had gone through about the same kind of country and had about the same experiences that had been our portion on the outward trip, and as a result the boy who came back was a well-seasoned young person, able to take care of himself in the gray wilderness of sage and bare buttes—of alkali water and quicksand—with the best cow puncher who lived there.

He had mastered the mysteries of

“throwing a rope” until he could catch a horse off-hand. He had sent lead across the landscape after deer and antelope until he had become satisfied from the abundance of shooting.

Horned toads, diamond-back rattlers and prairie dogs had become too commonplace to give more than a passing glance to, and now the youngster wanted to “rest up” along the little river again.

After all, it is the first love that is the best, although we may not think so sometimes, and thus become weaned away by the novelty and newness of the unknown and untried; but when the unknown becomes known to us it seems commonplace and we find ourselves wishing for the things that we knew so well before.

The boy was undergoing this change of heart as we came nearer home, and when we reached the top of the hill he had pulled up short as the sun hung low above the valley of the little river and the little town that spread up the slope of the eastern hillside — the place that the

boy knew so well—the place we called “home.”

What a meaning that little word has to the wanderer!

I think, perhaps, the boy felt the stress of it, and yet did not know what it was or why he felt it; but he looked long and earnestly at the scene—at the familiar houses and the shining river that wound about among the fringe of trees in the center of the valley.

After a little he spoke.

“C’manch, less go up river fishin’ t-morruh—will yeh?”

“Aren’t you a little premature with this fishing, my boy? Had we better not wait a few days and get acquainted with the folks a bit before we strike out on this new tack?”

The boy rubbed his chin reflectively and gazed at the ribbon of river where it came out of the north, then his eye ran the course of it down the valley past the little town, and on until the valley came to the rim of the southern sky.

“Yas, uh reckon that’s ’bout whut we’d ought to do, but I do want to juss chuck a minnie to thet ole Balaam ut I know is uh waitin’ ’n nunder th’ ole maple stump down there b’ th’ islan’. I know they’s one there juss ’s well ’s ’ough I’d uh seen him, cos ain’t nobody knows juss ’zackly where tu drop uh hook there ’ceptin’ you’n me, ’n’ we ain’t been heyer ’tall sence early this season; an’ ’nuther things is—— O, Gee! I furgot ’bout these heads we got in th’ wagon; guess we’ll haft tu let th’ fishin’ go tull we git them took care of, that’s uh fack—never thought ’bout them. G’up, Bill!”

And so we moved on down the gentle slope of hillside and entered the town.

Tired men, home-coming with dinner pail a-swing and coat across their other arm, looked at the travel-stained outfit and passed a pleasant “howdy” as we went by, some asking a few questions, others waiting for a later time to inquire about our success—you know this is a village habit, and each wanderer must come back

prepared to tell of his experiences in the far countries he has visited—yes, tell them in detail and over and over again, else the village folk will not be satisfied and the traveler is apt to be dubbed “stuck up” and adjudged to hold himself as a superior being because of his traveling and sight-seeing.

“Hullo! Ole man Hagey’s place muss’ uh bin sold er somp’n—look ut th’ new fence — ’n’ new sidewalk, ’n’ — Gee! They’s uh new kitchen, too! Guess his folks wouldn’t never go t’ all th’ expense o’ doin’ thet,” said the boy, as we drove by.

“There’s Curly Lee, ’n’ Sap Williams, ’n’ Ed Cole, ’n’ Walt Fiske, ’n’ uh whole gang o’ fellers comin’ down th’ street; bet they’re goin’ swimmin’. Hullo, fellers!”

“H’lo, kid! Git ’nything? Where yeh bin all summer? What—— Why——”

And a minute later there were a dozen or more boys all about the wagon and all trying to talk at once.

They clambered up on the wheels, shook

hands, raised the canvas wagon cover, and chattered like a bunch of magpies for about ten minutes.

By that time calm enough settled over the crowd to enable one to talk at once while the rest stood, arms akimbo, and listened or passed the comments such as all boydom passes under the circumstances.

When we began to move ahead once more, the boy had learned that this crowd of young savages were in truth going "swimmin'," and he had promised to "be down town at Lewis's" after supper. I knew that a business meeting of a flock of geese could not produce anything to compare with the noise and gabble that would be the programme at "Lewis's" that evening, in consequence.

This home-coming through a small town is a slow proceeding, and lights had begun to twinkle in the windows when the boy pulled up at the barn and we were at our journey's end, tired, dusty and glad that we were at home once more.

Then the welcome that was ours when

“the folks” found that we had returned—the thousand questions to be asked and answered while we unhitched and put the team away.

Then, while supper was being prepared, we must needs unload the outfit and carry everything up to the back porch, where it had to be re-sorted and such things as we decided could not be left outside had to be stowed away in odd corners about the house “till morning.”

Of course there were a dozen or more children from the neighborhood on hand to assist by asking queer questions, and “helping” by getting in just the wrong place at just the right time to have some one tramp on their numerous bare toes, until their infantile yells rent the air and brought more than one nervous mother skurrying in to see “what on airth ailded Jimmie.”

But what is the use of lumbering up columns of good type with this plain description? Everybody knows just how these things happen anyhow, for wander-

ers have wandered across the earth since time began, and some of them always come back to repeat the scene we enacted in the little town that evening. Always the children are on hand, and of course they get into some sort of trouble, and equally of course this always brings the mother, and many times the father also, and then the wanderer who wants a chance to get a bit of rest because of his physical fatigue must needs answer a rapid-fire lot of questions, most of them, of course, having no bearing on the subject at hand at all.

The boy did not get down "to Lewis's" that night, for it was 10 o'clock before we got our chairs away from the supper table, and even then the dishes had to "wait till morning" for their tri-daily bath which is part of the domestic mystery called "housekeeping."

When the last impromptu guest had looked at the clock for the tenth time and then suddenly discovered that it was "gettin' late," the boy and I again had a few

moments of comparative quiet, which we used by storing everything snug for the night, and at last even he, too, clattered down the steps and on down the walk with his merry whistle, bound homeward.

“Goo’ night, C’manch—see yeh in th’ mornin’,” he called as he passed out into the street and let the gate slam shut with a clang of complaining hinges.

The next morning he appeared very sleepy and woe-begone when he came around the corner of the house.

“Bin sleepin’ s’ long out o’ doors ’at uh couldn’t sleep ’tall tull uh tuk uh blanket ’n’ rolled up on th’ grass,” he explained.

THE END

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Just
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